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BY THE

REV. FATHER FRANCIS HUNOLT,

Priest of the Society of Jesus, and Preacher in the Cathedral of Treves.

Translated from the Original German Edition of Augsburg and Würzburg, 1748.

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ON THE IMITATION OF CHRIST.

FIRST SERMON.

HOW CHRIST IS SET FOR THE FALL OF MANY CHRISTIANS.

Subject.

Jesus Christ is set for the fall and eternal ruin even of many Christians; for even in Christendom but few good Christians are to be found.—*Preached on the Sunday in the Octave of the Nativity.*

Text.

Ecce positus est hic in ruinam et in resurrectionem multorum in Israel.—Luke ii. 34.

“Behold this Child is set for the fall and for the resurrection of many in Israel.”

Introduction.

O my God, what a terrible thing to say! “Behold this Child is set for the fall of many in Israel,” that is, for their eternal ruin. And of whom is that prophecy made? Of that Child who, born a few days before in a stable at Bethlehem, was even then being carried in the arms of Mary His virgin mother. He it is who was to be set for the fall of many in Israel. But is He not the same Child of whom the angel said to Joseph: “Thou shalt call His name Jesus: for He shall save His people from their sins”?¹ Is He not the same Child of whom the angels sang to the shepherds in the fields: “Behold I bring you good tidings of great joy, that shall be to all the people: for this day is born to you a Saviour, who is Christ the Lord”?² Is He not the same Son of God who came down on earth from heaven and took on Himself human nature, in order to save all men from eternal

¹ Vocabis nomen ejus Jesum: ipse enim salvum faciet populum suum a peccatis eorum.—Matt. i. 21.

² Ecce evangelizo vobis gaudium magnum, quod erit omni populo: quia natus est vobis hodie Salvator, qui est Christus Dominus.—Luke ii. 10.

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reprobation and damnation, and to restore to them the right to heaven? Yes, He is the same. But how can that be? For it is He who is set for the fall, the ruin of many, and what is most terrible, of many in Israel, that is, of many of the chosen, favorite people of God. Truly such is the case; for many of that people refused to live according to His teaching, and thus found an occasion of eternal ruin even in Jesus Christ, who was born for their resurrection and eternal life. Christians, is this prophecy to hold good for us too? Let us hope not. No, no; Jesus Christ is not set for the ruin of any true Christian, but is rather the resurrection and the life of all true Christians. But, alas! when I consider the Jewish people as a figure of Christendom, and on the other hand the life led by many Christians, I am afraid that few true Christians are to be found, and that therefore I have a sad prophecy to announce, and say:

Plan of Discourse.

“Behold this Child is set for the fall of many,” for the eternal ruin even of many Christians: because very few true Christians are to be found. Such is the whole subject of this sermon, the sole end and aim of which is, that we may all endeavor to become true Christians, so that none of us may be in the number of those of whom Christ is set for the fall and ruin.

Give us Thy powerful grace hereto, Christ Jesus, Saviour of the world; we beg it of Thee by the Mother who for the salvation of us all brought Thee forth in a stable, and also through the intercession of the holy angels, who at Thy birth announced peace and joy to the whole world.

Many Christians know not what a Christian is.

What is a Christian? Wherein consist his profession and his obligation? Do all who are Christians know this? You will be amazed, my dear brethren, at a question that even children learning their catechism are well able to answer. And why not? Must I ask a veteran warrior whether he understands his profession, and knows what it is to wage war; a merchant whether he understands business; a lawyer if he knows how to examine and defend a case; a doctor if he is able to administer medicines; a tradesman if he understands the principles of his handicraft? Would they not with reason be indignant with me, and say: what a foolish question! What do you take us for? Do you imagine we are ignorant of our profession or trade? So, too, may you

How Christ is Set for the Fall of Many Christians. 9

think, my dear brethren. What a foolish thing, you will say, to ask old, experienced, and intelligent people, who have grown up in the Catholic faith, if they know what a Christian is, and to what his profession binds him. Truly the question is an absurd one, and alas! that one may make bold to ask it. Meanwhile, although I believe that all those people mentioned could at once give me an account of their professions and occupations, and tell me what is required to make a brave warrior, a good merchant, a learned lawyer, a skilful doctor, an experienced tradesman; yet I fear that if I were to ask them the same question with regard to the profession of Christianity, many of them would not know what answer to make.

Let us see then what that answer should be. Is it not the case that the true Christian is one who, being baptized, believes all that the holy Roman Catholic Church believes and professes; that he signs himself with the sign of the holy cross, hears Mass on Sundays and holydays, abstains from flesh-meat at certain times, confesses his sins at least once a year, and receives holy Communion, etc.? Yes, all are in accord so far, and most people think that by observing those things they fulfil the obligations of a good Christian; and, what is most deplorable of all, since they think that they thus know enough of what is required of a good Christian, they take little or no trouble to examine further into the matter, to ask information of others, or to instruct themselves better. But, as St. Gregory Nazianzen says, the form and profession of the true Christian does not consist merely in baptism, in faith, in outward show, in making the sign of the cross, in going to church, in praying, fasting, confessing our sins and going to holy Communion; but the chief part of wisdom is a holy life.¹ If then you wish to know whether a man understands in what the profession of the Christian really consists, see whether or not he leads a good, holy, and Christian life.

The profession of a Christian is to lead a holy and virtuous life.

Let us examine the gospel of Christ, and we shall see this clearer. Many theologians are of the opinion that even if Adam had not sinned, and that we, his descendants, were not in the necessity of being redeemed from eternal death, nevertheless the Divine Word would have become Man, partly in order not to exclude human nature from the participation of the highest grace, and partly not to deprive His divinity of the greatest exterior honor and glory. Be that as it may, there is no doubt that satisfying

Shown from Scripture.

¹ *Prima sapientia est vita laudabilis.*

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for the sin of Adam was not the chief purpose of the Incarnation; for as St. Paul says, God came into the world, and showed Himself to us in visible form, "that He might present it to Himself a glorious Church, not having spot or wrinkle, or any such thing, but that it should be holy and without blemish."¹ And again elsewhere: "That He might cleanse to Himself a people acceptable, a pursuer of good works."² Now I ask with Salvianus: "Where is that clean, that acceptable people? where that people of good works? that people of sanctity?" They are certainly not unbelieving atheists, idolaters, heathens, Turks, Jews, or heretics. So that they can only be Catholic Christians. We, my dear brethren, and mark this well, must be that people according to our vocation and profession. What must we be? A people cleansed from sin, virtuous, pleasing to God, holy and immaculate. What must we be again? Hear what the Apostle says: "Fellow-citizens with the saints, and the domestics of God."³ We must have the high honor, and live according to it, "that we should be called, and should be the sons of God,"⁴ who are bound by law to love God above all things for His own sake; to love our neighbor as ourselves in God; to love even our enemies for God's sake; to keep in constant peace with God, with our neighbor, with ourselves; peace with God by avoiding sin and doing His holy will in all things; peace with ourselves by constant mortification of our evil inclinations and desires; peace with our neighbor by purifying our hearts from all hatred, envy, and other hostile feelings.

Confirmed
by the Fa-
thers.

Further, what is a Christian? Ask St. Gregory of Nyssa, and he will tell you that he is one who has taken on himself the obligation of imitating, as far as possible, the holiness of God.⁵ What is a Christian? Ask St. John Chrysostom; he will tell us that we are called the faithful, because we believe in God, "and have accepted from Him the obligation of living in justice, holiness, and purity of soul."⁶ What is a Christian? Ask St. Augustine, and he will tell you that "he is a true Christian who is merciful to all, is not aroused to anger by any injury, who shares

¹ Ut exhiberet ipse sibi gloriosam Ecclesiam, non habentem maculam, aut rugam, aut aliquid hujusmodi, sed ut sit sancta et immaculata.—Ephes. v. 27.

² Ut mundaret sibi populum acceptabilem, sectatorem bonorum operum.—Tit. ii. 14.

³ Cives sanctorum et domestici Dei.—Ephes. ii. 19.

⁴ Ut filii Dei nominemur et simus.—I. John iii. 1.

⁵ Christianismus est imitatio divins naturæ.

⁶ Fidelis propterea vocaris, quoniam credis Deo, et ab eo creditam justitiam habes, sanctitatem, munditiam animæ.

his bread with the poor and needy, who willingly sees himself despised and contemned by the world that he may have honor and esteem before God and the angels, whose heart is detached from worldly goods that he may all the more freely direct his desires to heavenly things." What is a Christian? Ask St. Ambrose, and he will tell you that he is a sworn servant of God, who in holy baptism has publicly and forever renounced the devil and his works, the world and its vain usages, the flesh and its lusts. "Remember the question you were asked," says the saint, "and the answer you gave," when in baptism you were admitted into the number of the followers of Christ. "I renounce," you said, and the angels were witnesses to your promise. Therefore by your own solemn engagement you should have nothing more to do with the devil, nothing with the world, nothing with the flesh. What is a Christian? Ask St. Maximus, and he will tell you that "the whole life of a Christian man who lives according to the Gospel is a cross and a martyrdom."¹ There, my dear brethren, you have a true picture of a real Christian, as he is described by the infallible word of God and by His holy doctors.

Now let us go into the world in thought for a while, and consider the lives of those who claim to be true Christians. How many of them shall we find living according to the prescribed form? Let each one enter into his own conscience, and see whether he is in the number of true Christians. What do you think? Would you consider him a good lawyer, doctor, architect, or artist, who, in all he does, makes mistakes contrary to the first principles of his profession? Would you entrust to such a man a lawsuit, the care of your health, the building of your house, or the execution of a work of art? Certainly not. And how then can we consider as good and true Christians those—although there is a great number of them—in whose lives and actions we find hardly anything but grievous faults against the profession and the rules of true Christianity? Who imagine themselves to be among the immaculate, holy people, followers of good works; merciful, patient, meek, humble, longing for nothing but the heaven that Jesus Christ gained for them by His blood; and yet show no sign of holiness in their lives? Who squander away the greater part of their lives in eating, drinking, sleeping, dressing, gambling, talking, amusing themselves, doing nothing, or doing wrong, while the little good they do is gen-

Most Christians have no mark of holiness.

¹ *Tota vita Christiani hominis, si secundum evangelium vivat, est crux atque martyrium.*

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erally wanting in a supernatural intention, without any relation to God, without merit, slothfully, carelessly, indolently? Who in their imaginations are full of pride, vain of their outward appearance and dress, and ashamed of the humble Saviour and His lowly gospel? Who through avarice will not, or through prodigality and luxury cannot, help the needy as they should? Who cannot bear in silence the least word of contradiction, much less an actual insult? Who cannot bear their own husbands, wives, friends, neighbors, to say nothing of loving their enemies? Whose greatest care and labor is devoted to earthly things, and who fear nothing so much as to be taken away from them by death, and therefore have no relish for heaven and eternal joys?

They are given to all kinds of vice.

Are they true children of God, "fellow-citizens with the saints, domestics of God" who—and again, there is a great number of them—remain for whole weeks, months, years, without repentance or amendment, in the miserable state of sin, slaves and bondsmen of the devil, although they renounced him in baptism? Who by their abominable habit of swearing and cursing, always have the devil on their lips, and by their bad example often lead their innocent children into the same detestable habit; who by impure discourses and songs, by unlawful caresses and gestures, by wantonness of manner and indecency in dress, place a stumbling-block in the way of the children of God, nay, sometimes act as agents of the devil, when by their teaching or exhortation and encouragement they lead others into wantonness? Are they true Christians, that is, dead to the world, which they also renounced in baptism, who hardly acknowledge any other guide than the usages of the vain world, who would be ashamed if they did not live as others do, according to the usual way of the world; who look on everything as good and lawful if they can only appeal in its defence to the custom of the world? It is the fashion, they say; others do it. Who laugh at and ridicule and despise as stupid and simple-minded those who follow their humble Saviour, and refuse to live according to the fashion of the world; are they true Christians (whose lives should be regulated according to the law of the gospel, and be a constant cross and martyrdom in the mortification of the flesh and its desires, to which again they bound themselves solemnly by oath in baptism) whose only thought is their bodily comfort; who gratify ears, eyes, and the other senses, with all freedom; who give a loose rein to their passions in all things when they have the opportunity; who gratify their carnal lusts

How Christ is Set for the Fall of Many Christians. 13

and encourage the rebellion of the flesh by intemperance and habitual drunkenness; who will not listen to a word about mortification, self-denial, or restraining their passions; who, even in the small trials that are sometimes sent them by the loving hand of God, cannot be resigned? All these St. Paul complains of bitterly in his epistle to the Philippians: "For many walk, of whom I have told you often (and now tell you weeping) that they are enemies of the cross of Christ: whose God is their belly, . . . but whose end is destruction."¹

Are they true Christians who indeed acknowledge one God with the faithful, one God whom they should love above all things with their whole hearts, but who, like heathens, bow down before idols to which the true God must give way, as far as love is concerned? What idols? Those creatures with whom they are entangled in the bonds of unlawful love, and whom they imagine once for all that they cannot leave; those dangerous companies and conversations in which, under the pretext of amusement, so much sin is committed in the shape of impure desires, looks, touches, and which they will not renounce; that proximate occasion of sin, which they refuse to avoid; the favor of that great man, out of respect for whom they will not say or do what the law of God obliges them to, as well as the duties of their state; that unlawful worldly custom that, out of human respect, they refuse to abolish; that stolen property that they will not restore. These, I say, are the gods they adore in their hearts, while they half bend the knee outwardly before the true God. Meanwhile, as they all do this much, and visit Christian churches, and receive now and then, God knows how, the Christian sacraments, they pretend to be good Christians, and are looked upon as such. But, as St. Augustine says, "How can he be called a Christian in whom there is no sign of the acts of a Christian?"²

When the holy priest Concordius was brought before Torquatus, the heathen judge, out of the prison in which he was confined, because he refused to adore idols, the judge asked him what he was, and what he called himself. I am a Christian, answered Concordius, bravely, and for that very reason I never can nor will adore your gods. But I wish to know how you are called, repeated the judge; what is your name? I am a Christian,

They side with infidels and idolaters.

Though the very name of Christian is averse to that. Shown by an example.

¹ Multi ambulantes, quos sæpe dicebam vobis (nunc autem et fens dico) inimicos crucis Christi: quorum Deus venter est. . . . quorum finis interitus. — Philipp. iii. 18, 19.

² Quomodo Christianus dicitur, in quo actus Christiani non apparent?

14 *How Christ is Set for the Fall of Many Christians.*

was the answer. Do you not hear what I say? I am asking your name, said the judge in anger, not what you are. Concordius calmly repeated his former answer, I have already told you that I am a Christian; from this one fact you should see that I can neither acknowledge nor worship your gods. He was then condemned to suffer hunger and thirst for three days, to be cruelly scourged with whips and rods, and to be tortured frightfully on the rack. But Concordius kept steadfastly to his answer. There is no use in this, he said; away with your false gods. I acknowledge and adore but the one true God of heaven and earth, and cannot accept any other, for I am a Christian. We all boast of this glorious name; but where are the deeds that should prove, without further demonstration being necessary, that we do not bear this name in vain?

And the law of Christ cannot harmonize with the law of the world. Explained by a simile.

If we are not ready to endure all the torments of the world rather than worship a single one of the idols of which we have spoken already, or adore it along with the true God, then to no purpose do we say that we are Christians. Virtue and vice, the spirit of Christ and the spirit of the world, God and an idol, cannot exist together in the heart. When the Philistines had conquered the Israelites in battle, and besides other booty had made a prize of the ark of the covenant, the Scripture says, "The Philistines took the ark of God, and brought it into the temple of Dagon, and set it by Dagon." But what happened? When the priests went next morning into the temple, they found their idol lying on the ground before the ark: "Behold Dagon lay upon his face on the ground, before the ark of the Lord." They then with all possible reverence replaced it; but things were no better on the following day, for Dagon was again found prostrate on the ground, and mutilated as well: "And the next day again, when they rose in the morning, they found Dagon lying upon his face on the earth before the ark of the Lord: and the head of Dagon and both the palms of his hands were cut off upon the threshold."¹ What was the cause of this fall and disgraceful mutilation? Perhaps the heathen priests dishonored the ark? No; for in their blindness they had no more honorable place in which to put it than the altar of their supposed deity.

¹ Tuleruntque Philistinim arcam Dei, et intulerunt eam in templum Dagon, et statuerunt eam juxta Dagon. Ecce Dagon jacebat pronus in terra ante arcam Domini. Rursusque mane die altera consurgentes, invenerunt Dagon jacentem super faciem suam in terra coram arcam Domini: caput autem Dagon, et duæ palmæ manuum ejus abscissæ erant super limen. — I. Kings v. 2-4.

How Christ is Set for the Fall of Many Christians. 15

Why then was the idol treated so severely? Do you wish to know why? In the ark of God was kept the law written on tables of stone: "I am the Lord thy God; thou shalt not have strange gods before Me." Therefore Dagon was thrown from the altar, and broken in pieces. For where the law of the true God is observed, there can be no room for idols. I am a Christian, says every one of those people mentioned above; I adore and honor Jesus Christ as my true God. Now if that is the case, if the spirit of Jesus Christ and the spirit of His holy law and gospel are hidden in your heart, then all idols must at once fall to the ground and be broken. But if a single one of them remains standing on the altar, if an impure love for a creature remains in your heart, if ill-gotten goods are still in your possession, if you still frequent the unlawful company and the proximate occasion of sin, if you are still influenced by human respect and by the vanity of the world, and continue to give scandal, then true Christianity, the spirit of Jesus Christ, and the law of His holy gospel can find no room in your soul; so that to no purpose do you boast of the honorable name of Christian.

Ah, my dear brethren, if we were to go through all Christendom in that way, and examine the lives of all Christians, I fear we should often have reason to sigh and exclaim with Bishop Salvianus: "It is a sad and painful thing that I am about to say: with the exception of a very few who avoid evil, what else is nearly the whole of Christendom, but a sink of vice?" How truly then the aged Simeon said of Our Lord in the temple: "Behold this Child is set for the fall of many in Israel"! He is set for the fall and eternal damnation of many of the chosen people of God, of many in Christendom, because they will not live according to the teaching of Christ.

Wo to us! How shall we be able to excuse our sinful lives on the last day of general judgment, when many shall come forward out of the darkness of heathendom, and accuse and condemn us before the judgment-seat of God, because they lived better in their darkness than we in the clear light of day? Yes, O my God, many might think: what answer shall I make Thee? None other than this: I have known Thy holy law well, but I have not lived according to it. I should and could have lived as a true Christian; but as a true Christian I did not wish to live. I have had the name of Christian without the reality. In every other business and occupation I undertook I tried to do my best; I en-

Hence there are few true Christians.

Bad Christians will have no excuse before the tribunal of Christ.

16 *How Christ is Set for the Fall of Many Christians.*

deavored to be a good provider for my household, a good man of business, a good lawyer, a good tradesman; while the one only necessary affair, that should have occupied my attention above all others, for the sake of which alone I have been sent into this world, namely, that of being a good and true Christian, that I have neglected. I have worked for my family to provide for it; for sufficient food and drink; for money; for decent clothing; but my least care was about regulating my life according to the holy gospel, and to see whether it was a good or a bad one.

Resolution
to live ac-
cording to
the law of
the gospel
of Christ
and the ex-
ample of
the saints.

That I may not have to make this sad confession when it will be too late, and when I shall be forced to make it, I will now make a change in my mode of life, and seek to satisfy, not the customs of the vain world, nor the law of the sinful flesh, nor the suggestions of the devil and his partisans, but the maxims of the gospel of Christ. To that end I shall profit by the example of the holy Abbess Margaret, who was wont three times a year to separate herself from all human conversation and from her ordinary business, in order to consider and to renew the obligations she undertook in baptism; and this she used to do on Holy Saturday, on which the baptismal water is blessed; on Pentecost Sunday, on which the Holy Ghost came into the world, whose sanctifying grace she received for the first time in baptism; and finally, on the feast of St. Margaret, whose name she had received in baptism. These three days she would spend in the meditation of the oath and promise by which in baptism she renounced the devil, the world, and the flesh forever when she became a Christian; and also in considering her past life, so as to see if she had always lived in conformity with her promise and profession; and if she found any fault or sin she would repent of it sincerely and take measures to avoid it in future. So too shall I do; and if I cannot devote a whole day to meditation, I will at least frequently and seriously ask myself with St. Bernard: Why art thou here? Why hast thou come into this world? What art thou? Thou art a Christian, that is, a member of the Church of Christ, a follower of the doctrine and the life of Christ; that is the meaning of the name thou bearest. Art thou such in reality? Does thy life correspond with this name? To what art thou bound in baptism? What didst thou then solemnly and on oath promise to God? How hast thou kept thy promise? And if I find anything in my life or morals that is inconsistent with my promise and profession and state as a Christian, I shall at once

say: Away with it; away from my body, from my habits, from my heart, from my senses and desires. And if any one asks me what has become of my former habits of life, conversation, amusement, dress, recreation, etc., I shall answer as did St. Serapion, who was so charitable towards the poor that often when he had nothing else to give them he would take the clothes from his own body in order to cover therewith the poor of Christ. When he was asked what left him so bare, he would hold up the book of the Gospels and say: There is the thief that has robbed me. O happy me if I shall be able to say with truth: See, there is the law of the holy and humble gospel of Christ, of which I have made profession; this it is that has made such a change in me, that has robbed me of my former luxurious mode of life, and of everything that, as I now know, does not harmonize with my faith and the Christian doctrine. Let others think, speak, and act as they will; I will say to myself: I am a Christian. As a true Christian in name and in reality I will live and die. Such, O Lord! is my resolution, and I shall faithfully keep it with the help of Thy grace, that I may be one of those for whom Thou art set, not for the fall and eternal damnation (O dearest Lord, keep my will from that!), but for the resurrection to eternal life. Amen.

SECOND SERMON.

ON THE CHRISTIAN'S CONFORMITY WITH THE LIFE OF CHRIST.

Subject.

1. The life of a true Christian must be regulated according to the life of Jesus Christ. 2. Examen to see whether our lives are such.—*Preached on the first Sunday after Epiphany.*

Text.

Jesus proficiebat sapientia, et etate, et gratia apud Deum et homines.—Luke ii. 52.

“Jesus advanced in wisdom and age, and grace with God and men.”

Introduction.

Did then Jesus, infinite Wisdom, become somewhat wiser than before? And Jesus, infinite Holiness, the Author of all grace, was He once less holy, less in favor with God than afterwards? No, that cannot be. Christ, according to all theologians, was

as wise and holy and prudent and full of grace at the first moment, when He was conceived in the womb of His Mother, as He afterwards was when He came to man's estate, and when He was dying on the cross. How then can it be that He advanced in wisdom and grace daily? Those words, say the commentators of Holy Writ, are not to be understood to mean that Christ, as He advanced in years, gained virtues that He had not before; but that He let His infinite virtues shine more and more before the eyes of men. For He wished in all things to seem before men as an ordinary child who does not come to the use of reason before a certain time. And that in order to give us an example that we may follow all the more easily, seeing in Him how we must act in order, like Him, to increase daily in virtue. And this is the second requisite of the true Christian, as I shall now explain in detail :

Plan of Discourse.

The life of a true Christian must be regulated according to the life of Jesus Christ; as I shall show in the first part. How is it with me? Is my life regulated according to the example of Jesus Christ? This is the question that each one must ask himself; as we shall see in the second part.

Jesus Christ, Model of those who are chosen for the kingdom of heaven, enlighten our minds and urge on our wills, that if we have not done it hitherto, we may, in future, shape our lives and actions according to Thine. This we beg of Thee through the intercession of Thy holy Mother, who was most like to Thee, and of the holy angels.

Christ became man to teach us how to live in word.

When the good God created man, He impressed on him the form and image of His own divine being : " Let us make man to our image and likeness." ¹ Why? To what end and object? " That," answers St. Leo, " he might be the imitator of his Author." ² That man, as a living picture of God, might by imitation become like to his Creator. Hence, as God is especially occupied with the knowledge and love of His Godhead, so also man's imitation of God and likeness to the divine nature consists in this, that he truly knows and loves God in the manner in which God wishes him to know and love. But as, on the one hand, it is impossible for a creature to have the infinite perfection of the

¹ *Faciamus hominem ad imaginem et similitudinem nostram.*—Gen. 1. 26.

² *Ut imitator esset sui Auctoris.*

divine knowledge and love, and, on the other, sin has darkened man's mind and weakened his will, thus making him less capable of the right knowledge and love of God, the divine wisdom has found a means of supplying our wants in this respect, by becoming man like to us, so that God showed Himself to us in visible form. To what end; for what object? Not merely to offer full satisfaction to the offended justice of the Eternal Father, and to save us from the everlasting death we so richly deserved; but also to be our Teacher, to instruct us in the manner in which we should live in order to gain heaven. St. Paul writes: "For the grace of God our Saviour hath appeared to all men." Why? "Instructing us that, denying ungodliness and worldly desires, we should live soberly and justly and godly in this world, looking for the blessed hope and coming of the glory of the great God and our Saviour, Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for us that He might redeem us from all iniquity, and might cleanse to Himself a people acceptable, a pursuer of good works."¹

Our Lord was not satisfied with merely teaching and instructing; He Himself was pleased to be our Model, Pattern, and Exemplar, in whose life and actions we might see how our lives are to be regulated, so as to attain to the true knowledge and love of God, and after this life to eternal life in heaven, as our sole end and aim. This was what the Prophet Isaias foretold to the people of Israel when he spoke of the Incarnation: "And the Lord will not cause thy teacher to flee away from thee any more: and thy eyes shall see thy teacher. And thy ears shall hear the word: This is the way, walk in it: and go not aside, neither to the right hand, nor to the left."² Not otherwise than as a skilful master is wont to instruct his apprentices; he is not satisfied with merely telling them in words what tools they must use, and how they are to set about the work, in order to bring it to a successful conclusion; but he sets to work himself, and takes the tools in his hand: look at me, he says, and see what I am doing. Even so does Jesus Christ, our Teacher, act with us mortals. "For I have given you an example," He said to His disciples after

And by example.

¹ Apparuit enim gratia Dei, salvatoris nostri, omnibus hominibus: erudiens nos, ut abnegantes impletatem et secularia desideria, sobrie, et juste, et pie vivamus in hoc sæculo: expectantes beatam spem, et adventum gloriæ magni Dei, et salvatoris nostri Jesu Christi: qui dedit semetipsum pro nobis, ut nos redimeret ab omni iniquitate, et mundaret sibi populum acceptabilem, sectatorem bonorum operum.—Tit. ii. 11-14.

² Non faciet avolare a te ultra doctorem tuum, et erunt oculi tui videntes præceptorem tuum. Et aures tuæ audient verbum: Hæc est via, ambulate in ea, et non declinetis neque ad dexteram, neque ad sinistram.—Is. xxx. 20, 21.

having washed their feet. To what end? "That as I have done to you, so you do also."¹ Truly, says St. Augustine, "the whole life of Christ, as long as He was on earth, was a pattern for man whom He had made."²

Hence we are bound to order our lives by His teaching and example.

Thus, my dear brethren, the end and aim of the Incarnation, besides our redemption, was to teach us by word and example how we should live. And hence it follows necessarily that we, on our side, are bound to order our lives and actions according to the example set us by the Son of God. For to no purpose would He be our Master if we were not obliged to attend to His instructions; to no purpose would He have placed Himself before us as our Pattern, if we were not bound to imitate Him. No, He says Himself: "I have given you an example," not in vain or without purpose, but "that as I have done to you, so you do also." "Christ also suffered for us," says St. Peter, "leaving you an example that you should follow His steps. For unto this are you called."³ For that very reason you were brought to the Christian faith, and incorporated with His holy Church. And St. Paul confirms this: "As many of you as have been baptized in Christ have put on Christ,"⁴ that is, as St. John Chrysostom explains, nothing else but Christ should be seen in your eyes and countenance, in your manner and gait, in your outward appearance and clothing and conversation.⁵

And he is not a true Christian who does not try to make his life resemble that of Christ.

From which nearly all the other holy Fathers draw this conclusion, that he cannot be looked on as a true Christian who does not endeavor to make his life like that of Jesus Christ. Christianity, says St. Gregory of Nyssa, is a conformity with Christ; now, as Christ is justice, purity, truth, and humility itself, "he cannot be a Christian who does not evince in his life a familiarity and acquaintance with those virtues."⁶ Tertullian, when upbraided by the heathens with the fact that some Christians departed from the example of the virtues of Christ, replied: It is, alas, true; but you must know that we do not look on these as Christians.⁷ In a word, says St. Leo, "to no purpose are we

¹ Exemplum enim dedi vobis, ut quemadmodum ego feci vobis, ita et vos faciatis.—John xiii. 15.

² *Tota vita Christi in terris, pro homine quem fecit disciplina morum fuit.*

³ Christus passus est pro nobis, vobis relinquens exemplum, ut sequamini vestigia ejus. In hoc enim vocati estis.—I. Pet. ii. 21.

⁴ Quicumque in Christo baptizati estis, Christum induistis.—Gal. iii. 27.

⁵ Et ab aspectu, et ab incessu, et a veste, et a voce.

⁶ Christianus esse nequit, qui illorum communionem et societatem in se non ostendit.

⁷ Desinunt tamen haberi Christianos apud nos.

called Christians if we are not imitators of Christ,"¹ who calls Himself the way, that the life of the Master might be a pattern and model for the disciples. Such too is the teaching of St. Augustine and other doctors of the Church. My dear brethren, are these things fables or truths? If I were to ask a lover of the world: do you too practise all the virtues of which Christ has left us an example? does your life harmonize with that of Christ? he would have to shrug his shoulders and acknowledge in his own conscience that he finds a great dissimilarity between his mode of life and the life of Christ. But if I were then to say to him: therefore you are not worthy of the name of Christian, nor have you any part in Christ, he would be angry; and yet that would be the truth as it is taught by the holy Fathers, the apostles of Christ, and Christ Himself.

But, you think, that is not to be understood so rigorously and exactly. To follow the Son of God, to walk in His footsteps, to live as He lived, that is a perfection to which the evangelical counsels exhort those who wish to strive for perfection; but it is not an obligation to which we are all bound by a positive command. Such is the idea of most people, who imagine that perfection is a thing suited only for religious in convents, but not for people who have to live in the world. These men make for themselves quite a different set of rules and principles, founded on the laws of the world; so that in their eyes every fashion, pleasure, and mode of life that suits the customs of the world is good and lawful. But how far they are mistaken! exclaims St. Chrysostom; "you deceive and befool yourself completely."² To imitate the life of Christ is no counsel, but an obligation, not merely for religious and the perfect, but for all Christian men. Hear what Our Lord says to His disciples: "What I say to you, I say to all."³ And what did He say? This among other things: "If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me."⁴ "I say to all;" this holds good for all men, rich and poor, clergy and laity, married and single, noble and lowly; no matter who they are, they must deny themselves, take up their cross, follow Christ, and model their lives on His.

What holds good for each and every Christian.

¹ Frustra appellamur Christiani, si imitatores non sumus Christi.

² Fallis teipsum prorsus, et decipis.

³ Quod autem vobis dico, omnibus dico.—Mark xiii. 37.

⁴ Si quis vult post me venire, abneget semetipsum, et tollat crucem suam, et sequatur me.—Matt. xvi. 24.

He who neglects this has no claim to heaven. Proved from the Scripture.

And under what penalty are we bound to do this? Under this: that they alone shall be chosen for heaven who strive after that conformity. Such is the testimony of St. Paul: "Whom he foreknew, He also predestinated to be made conformable to the image of His Son;" that is, those whom He has elected for the glory of heaven.¹ Under this penalty, they who do not imitate the life of Christ shall be condemned to everlasting fire. Such is the threat uttered by Our Lord: "If any one abide not in Me, he shall be cast forth as a branch, and they shall gather him up, and cast him into the fire, and he burneth."² What does that mean? Not only that we must be united with Christ by faith in Him, but also that we must become conformable to Him by imitating His virtues, according to the explanation given by St. John in his first Epistle: "He that saith he abideth in Him, ought himself also to walk even as He walked."³ If he refuses to do that, he does not abide in Christ, and therefore he will be rejected and cast into the fire as a dried-up branch.

Confirmed by the words of Christ.

Hear further what He says to all: "I am the way."⁴ "No man cometh to the Father but by Me."⁵ "I am the door. By Me if any man shall enter in, he shall be saved."⁶ "Therefore," exclaims the learned Origen, "neither the passionate nor the proud man enters by the door of humility and meekness; for that door is at once closed, and will not allow any one to enter who is not like Himself."⁷ Therefore, since an eternity in heaven or in hell depends thereon, it is not an evangelical counsel, but a weighty obligation which binds all men to do their utmost to regulate their lives according to the actions and life of Christ. What do we think of this, my dear brethren? How is it with our lives? Have they hitherto been conformable to the life of Our Lord? Are they not actually opposed to it? This we shall see in the

Second Part.

To know if our lives are like the life

What do we do in order to see whether a picture or portrait is well or ill-executed, and is like or not to the original? We

¹ Quos præcivit, et prædestinavit conformes fieri imaginis Filii sui.—Rom. viii. 29.

² Si quis in me non manserit, mittetur foras sicut palmas, et arescet, et colligent eum, et in ignem mittent, et ardet.—John xv. 6.

³ Qui dicit se in ipso manere, debet, sicut ille ambulavit, et ipse ambulare.—I. John ii. 6.

⁴ Ego sum via.—John xiv. 6.

⁵ Nemo venit ad Patrem, nisi per me.—Ibid.

⁶ Ego sum ostium. Per me si quis introierit, salvabitur.—John x. 9.

⁷ Ergo per ostium humilitatis et mansuetudinis, nec iracundus ingreditur, nec superbus: continuo clauditur, et per se transire non sinit distmlem sibi.

need only compare it with the original, and see how one suits the other. Christ, my dear brethren, is our Model, the Original Picture to whom we must become like, as we have seen; we are the copy, as St. Paul writes to the Galatians: "My little children, of whom I am in labor again, until Christ be formed in you."¹ Therefore, if we are to resemble Him, our lives must be of such a nature that he who sees them may think he sees the life of Christ, according to the answer of Our Lord Himself to the apostle who asked Him: "Lord, show us the Father." "Philip," answered the Lord, "he that seeth Me seeth the Father also."² In order, then, to see whether we are thus conformable to Christ, we must set the original on one side and ourselves on the other, and then we shall be able to find out. Not without reason does Our Lord call Himself the light: "I am the light of the world."³ According as a picture is held in a proper light or not, so does it appear beautiful or otherwise to us; and even the most perfect work of art, if held in a place where the light is bad, or falls on it sparingly, seems monstrous to our eyes,—it looks to be nothing better than a mass of colors thrown any way on the canvas; while a mere daub, full of faults and the work of a tyro, if placed in the same position, will look far better. But if both are set in a proper light, then you will change your judgment as to the relative merits of the two works, and will have to acknowledge that the first is a work of art, while the second could only come from the hand of an apprentice. My dear brethren, if we consider the lives and actions of different men according to our natural inclinations, the maxims of the world and general custom, oh, we exclaim, that is a fine fellow, a splendid man; these people know the world and how to live; and of others: oh, what a silly man; what a melancholy, stupid, shamefaced fellow that is! He ought to retire into the desert; he is not at all fit for the world. But if you consider them in the right light, and compare them with the Original, who is Jesus Christ, the "light of the world," you will change your judgment, and will see truly where the fault lies, and who has best imitated the Original in His life and actions.

of Christ, we must compare our actions with His. Shown by a simile.

Now, my dear brethren, let us cast a glance or two at the true Light, and see on one side the Original Picture, Jesus Christ, and

Christ despised all that the

¹ Filii mei, quos iterum parturio, donec formetur Christus in vobis.—Gal. iv. 19.

² Domine, ostende nobis Patrem. Philippe, qui videt me, videt et Patrem.—John xiv. 8, 9.

³ Ego sum lux mundi.—Ibid. viii. 12.

world es-
timate.

what He is like, and on the other the copy, to find out what we resemble. When Christ came into the world, He had none of those things that the world looks on as good and desirable—honor and influence, pomp and splendor, pleasure and joys, and other things of the kind. Of these I cannot find the least trace in that beautiful Picture, but rather quite the contrary. It was in His power to choose what He pleased; what did He select as the characteristics of His life? Poverty, humiliation, persecution, shame and disgrace, suffering and death; a poor workman is His father in the eyes of the world, a poor virgin His true mother, an abandoned stable in the open field was His dwelling; like the child of a poor beggar, He had been refused admittance into the inns of Bethlehem; swaddling-clothes are His raiment, a wooden manger His couch, a handful of straw His covering; the breath of the cattle is His fire in the frost and cold of the winter; lowly, simple shepherds are His visitors; a hurried flight by night into the unknown and heathen land of Egypt His arms to defend His life and honor against the persecutions of men. He had not even a handful of earth on the whole globe that He could call His own. A poor garment, fashioned by His poor Mother, was His only robe of state; and afterwards, up to the last three years of His life, He dwelt in a poor little cottage unknown to the world, where in obedience to His parents, His occupation was to work hard for His daily bread. In these last three years, poor, unlettered, ignorant fishermen were His friends and companions; fasting, watching, prayer, suffering hunger and thirst, travelling on foot, seeking and converting sinners and healing the sick were His occupations; detraction, calumny, abuse, blasphemies were the compliments and thanks He received for the services He rendered; bonds and manacles, thorns and scourges, lance-thrusts and nails, scorn and contempt were the rewards He willingly accepted; and finally He made His exit from the world by the shameful death of the cross. Why was that? Why did Christ wish to appear in that guise on earth?

Do you desire to know? Hear what St. Augustine says: "Our Lord Jesus Christ being made Man, despised all earthly goods to show that they are despicable."¹ And what was His character in other things during His lifetime? Let St. Bernard answer this: "When I say Jesus, I bring before my mind a man who is

¹ *Omnia bona terrena contempsit homo factus Dominus Christus, ut contempnda monstraret.*

meek and humble of heart, benignant, temperate, chaste, merciful, and conspicuous by every kind of virtue and holiness,"¹ such are the words of the saint. There we have a hasty sketch of the Original Picture.

Now what is the copy like, when compared to it? When I consider my life in the light of this Picture, what is it like? Alas, what a wretched copy it is! In almost every particular I find a want of resemblance; pride, the vanity of the world, pomp and splendor, to appear great before men, to be admired and honored, to add daily to my wealth, bodily comforts, the delights of the flesh, joys and pleasures, agreeable conversation, good food and drink, long and quiet sleep, passing the time in idleness, visiting, gambling, and amusing myself: are not those the things that I have hitherto looked on as constituting a happy life? To what do my wishes and desires, my greatest cares and efforts tend? If Christ had recommended me to lead a life of that kind in order to come to Him in heaven, could I have imitated Him better than I have hitherto done? But in reality He has condemned and despised all this, that I might learn from Him to despise it too, and to follow Him in His humility, meekness, modesty, poverty of spirit, temperance, mercy, mortification, and love of the cross; but of these latter virtues, what slight trace I can find in my life! For hitherto these and things like them have seemed to me terrible, so that I have looked on them with disgust, and avoided them as something dreadful.

Alas, must I not be ashamed whenever I look at the picture of Jesus Christ my Saviour? St. Paula, an illustrious princess related to the Roman Emperor, born and bred in the lap of luxury, went once to Jerusalem, and was received there by the princes and nobles of the place in a manner befitting her exalted rank. What, my dear brethren, do you think were Paula's feelings on the occasion, suitable to her dignity as was the reception given her? Did she not show pleasure and satisfaction at the sight of it? Pleasure! She began to sigh and weep, and to be exceedingly troubled. As St. Jerome says of her: "She, a matron of the highest and noblest family, was afflicted by the honor shown her."² And why so? Because she thought to herself: now I am going to the land where the Son of God was thrust out of house and

Most people
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a contrary
way.

They are
put to
shame by
the example
of the
saints.
Shown by
an example.

¹ Cum nomine Jesum, hominem mihi propono mitem et humilem corde, benignum, sobrium, castum, misericordem, et omni denique honestate et sanctitate conspicuum.

² Excelsi apud sæculum generis, et nobilissimæ familiæ, incerebat honore suo.

home to be born in a poor stable; where the King of glory, unknown to the world, was most exceedingly humiliated, despised, and persecuted, even to the shameful death of the cross; and to me such honor is shown? "She was afflicted by the honor shown her." That was the thought that forced the sighs from her heart and the tears from her eyes in her sorrow. And what are our dispositions, my dear brethren, when we consider how the Son of God was humiliated for our sake? Are we afflicted when honor is shown us, and when men praise us? Ah, no! for that is what we seek most greedily. The point of honor is such a delicate matter with us, that we cannot allow the least thing to tamper with it. If a visit we think due to us is not paid; if in passing through the street we are not saluted with sufficient respect; if an ordinary greeting is omitted, a request refused, a word of contradiction uttered against us, we look on it as an affront, an insult; our hearts retain for a long time the angry feelings excited by it, and we begin to cast about for the means of taking revenge and satisfaction. Ah, how unlike the original picture, Jesus Christ!

Confirmed
by another.

Elizabeth, a royal princess of Hungary, as Surius relates in her life, had on a certain great feast-day arrayed herself in costly attire, more with the view of pleasing the king, her husband, than from motives of vanity. On her head she wore a crown of precious stones, diamonds shone in her hair, while her neck was adorned with pearls, and her dress was made of silk and velvet glittering with gold and silver. In this royal and majestic array, she came to church, accompanied by the whole court, and seated herself on a raised throne. While praying, she happened to cast her eyes at a picture representing, with wonderful art, Jesus Christ crucified. The sight and consideration of this picture made her change color at once; she turned red and pale; copious tears bedewed her cheeks, and her heart was filled with such lively sentiments of compassion that she fell in a faint to the ground as if she were dead. When she came to herself again, she began to sigh and weep afresh. Ah, my Lord and my God! she exclaimed, regardless of the presence of so many ladies and gentlemen, who listened to her in amazement: Ah, my Lord and my God! have I then begun to lie as soon as I could speak? I swore to Thee to drown all pomp and vanity in the water of holy baptism, and see how I now appear before Thee! How can I dare look at Thee, and try to pass myself off as a Christian? Thou, my divine Master, art crowned with thorns, while Elizabeth wears a

crown of pearls; Thy hair is dishevelled and bloodstained, while Elizabeth's is curled and dressed with care; Thou art clad with blood and wounds, and Elizabeth with purple, silver, and gold. Thou art nailed to the hard bed of the cross, while Elizabeth is seated on a throne of soft velvet. Thus sighing and weeping bitterly in the presence of all the people, she tore off the precious stones from her hair, the pearls from her neck, the jewels from her ears and arms, and whatever costly adornments she could spare from the remainder of her dress, and throwing them from her on the floor with a holy indignation, she laid her crown at the feet of the Crucified, and cried out in a loud voice: Far be it from me, a vile worm of earth, to appear adorned with pomp and splendor in the presence of my Lord Jesus Christ, whom I see crowned with thorns! Never more, O Jesus, shall that crown adorn my head, or that costly array my body! Away with all vain pomp that is not suitable for a Christian woman, since Christ the King of glory hung poor and humble on the cross! And she kept her word. Thus Elizabeth made a commencement of her holy life, on account of which she is now revered on the altar in the Church of God.

Christians, it is not necessary to spend much time in explaining what many of us should think of this incident, nor what our resolution should be; that I leave to yourselves. But one thought strikes me: Elizabeth was a queen, and yet she thought it unseemly for a Christian, unjust and disgraceful, to appear in costly array, while her Master, Jesus Christ, was before her in far different guise. The crucified Son of God is still represented in our churches, in the public streets, in private houses, and likely, too, in the rooms in which we dress in the morning; at all events He should be always present in our hearts and minds; now, how can we, as followers of the Crucified, appear in extravagant and scandalous array in the streets, in the churches consecrated to God, in the confessionals, even at the very Table of the Lord, who by His teaching and example has shown us that we should despise all such things? How can we dare, when dressed in that way, to ask Our Lord, when we have Him with us in the holy Communion, for the grace of humility, a virtue without which no one can enter heaven? Do you think that it is a sufficient excuse to say that such is the fashion; that the world requires it, etc. ? But is it not the world that Jesus Christ has condemned by His teaching and example? He has expressly told us that we

Hence they
have no
excuse.

must not live according to the world; He Himself had none of the things that the world values, nor did He follow any of its customs; that He has taught us by His example. "The prince of this world is already judged,"¹ said He to His disciples; and that judgment was pronounced after the Son of man came into the world; that is, after I made My appearance in poverty, humility, and suffering, the cupidity, vanity, and lusts of the world are already condemned, and can no longer find any excuse. O holy St. Bernard, when we compare our lives with the Original, with the true Light, how justly we might sigh forth, as thou didst: "There are some for whom Christ is not yet born,"² who in their inward and outward behavior act as if Christ had not become Man for them to give them an example and to show them how they should live; and therefore there are Christians who have no resemblance to Christ, and consequently can have no part with Him. And from this very fact we can see how true are the words of the Lord: "Many are called, but few chosen."

Exhortation
and resolution
to live
according
to the life of
Christ.

My dear brethren, I conclude with the words of St. Paul to the Corinthians: "Always bearing about in our body the mortification of Jesus, that the life also of Jesus may be made manifest in our bodies."³ With the poor Jesus we can and must put on mortification with regard to worldly goods, even in the midst of riches, that is, we must not allow our hearts and desires to be attached to them. With the humble Jesus we can and must put on mortification with regard to the honors and pomps of the world, so as to observe inward and outward modesty, and not to conform to the vain usages of the world. With the crucified Jesus we can and must put on the mortification of the flesh and of worldly pleasures, and must always bear that mortification about with us by avoiding all unlawful delights of the flesh, and by a constant restraint of the senses, and patiently bearing all trials, so that the life of Jesus may be represented in our lives. "Put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ,"⁴ writes the Apostle to the Romans, and alluding to these words, St. John Chrysostom says: "Clothe, therefore, and adorn yourselves with the virtues of Christ, to the end especially that by your outward life and profession, as by a

¹ Princeps hujus mundi jam judicatus est.—John xvi. 11.

² Sunt quibus nondum natus est Christus.

³ Semper mortificationem Jesu in corpore nostro circumferentes, ut et vita Jesu manifestetur in corporibus nostris.—II. Cor. iv. 10.

⁴ Induitimini Dominum Jesum Christum.—Rom. xiii. 14.

garment, all may know you to be servants of Christ.”¹ O dearest Saviour, if Thou hadst not bound me to this, but hadst merely left it free for me to live according to my own good will and pleasure, even then I should look on it as the greatest honor and happiness to follow Thee, my Lord and my God; for could anything that seemed good to Thee, and that Thou hast chosen to make me happy, seem too hard or too mean for me? Much more then should I resolve to tread in Thy footsteps on earth, since otherwise Thou dost threaten me that I shall have no part in Thy kingdom. Therefore, in future I shall admit no other rule and guide for my life and actions but Thy holy, poor, humble, and crucified life; whatever is contrary to that shall be rejected by me as wrong and unworthy a Christian. All my inward thoughts and desires, all my outward senses and behavior, shall be directed, according to the example Thou hast given me, to Thy honor and glory; so that after having reproduced in myself on earth the likeness of the example Thou hast given me, I may possess Thee in heaven as my greatest Joy. Amen.

¹ *Induimini ergo, et ornate vos Christi virtutibus, maxime ut externa vita et professione quasi veste, agnoscant omnes vos esse servos Christi.*

ON THE LIFE OF CHRIST:

THIRD SERMON.

ON THE BIRTH OF CHRIST.

Subject.

In His birth Christ chose, 1. the extremity of humiliation; 2, the extremity of poverty. Consolation for the poor; confusion for the proud.—*Preached on the Feast of the Nativity of Our Lord.*

Text.

Et hoc vobis signum: invenietis infantem pannis involutum, et positum in præsepio.—Luke ii. 12.

“And this shall be a sign unto you: You shall find the Infant wrapped in swaddling-clothes, and laid in a manger.”

Introduction.

Prodigious, nay, as it might well seem, absurd are the statements made in the gospel of to-day. It tells us how the angels announced the birth of the eternal Son of God, the Saviour of the world. But to whom? To a few poor, lowly, simple shepherds who were guarding their flocks in the fields. Where were they to find the new-born God? In a stable. How were they to recognize Him? By the swaddling-clothes, the manger, and the state of a helpless infant. What a prodigious, and to speak, if I may do so, according to the manner of the world, what an absurd thing! How can those signs be suited to Him whose birth and advent are here announced? Is He not the great King of heaven and earth? And what then have the shepherds to do with Him? Why are not all the princes and monarchs of the world summoned to pay homage to Him on bended knee as His most submissive vassals? Is He not the great God, who is to rescue the world from the slavery of hell? How then can He be recognized in that lowly array? To our ideas a palace of gold, and countless ministers

and attendants would seem, although inadequate enough, yet somewhat better suited to His infinite majesty. My dear brethren, such is the opinion of the foolish world, and of all its lovers. But quite different is the judgment of the God of infinite wisdom, who was born for us to-day. The proud world esteems and values nothing but what is outwardly great, magnificent, and showy before men; the comfort-loving world admires abundance of wealth and good things, and abhors nothing more than poverty and want. The Son of God comes into the world to put its foolish wisdom to shame and confusion; for at the very beginning of His life He chose quite the contrary to what it loves, and He chose it in an extreme degree. And this is what I mean to explain to-day in words, while we keep the stable of Bethlehem before the eyes of our minds; and everything we see therein shall remind us forcibly of the words of the Apostle to the Philippians: He "emptied Himself."¹ The Lord Jesus Christ lowered Himself extremely in all things; that is, in all things He chose for Himself the most lowly and the most abject.

Plan of Discourse.

We shall there find a Child: behold the extremity of humiliation; as we shall see in the first part. Wrapped in swaddling-clothes and laid in a manger: the extremity of poverty; as we shall see in the second part. Come now with me in thought, ye poor Christians, who are lowly and contemptible in the eyes of the world; and come you too, rich, proud, vain children of the world. The former, that they may find in their poor and humble God true comfort and consolation in their misery and poverty; the latter, that they may be ashamed, and acknowledge how far they have hitherto erred in their judgments, and how the world has deceived them by teaching them to seek happiness in honors and riches alone; and that they may at last learn that the road to heaven is quite different from the one they have been travelling.

Do Thou, O dear Lord, lying poor and humble in the stable, enlighten our minds, that we may not be merely idle spectators and admirers, but true followers of Thy humility and poverty. This we beg through the intercession of Thy Mother, who was poor and humble with Thee, and of the holy angels, who were awestruck at the humility of their Creator.

Hardly do I enter in thought into the stable of Bethlehem *In His birth*

¹ *Semetipsum exinanivit.*—Philipp. ii. 7.

God chose
that which
is lowliest in
nature.

when the first glance shows me the extreme humility of the Son of God made man. The Creator of nature selected for Himself what is most lowly in nature, the meanest condition of nature, the weakest age of nature. For I find Him here, as far as nature is concerned, a man; as far as condition is concerned, a servant; as far as age is concerned, a child. I know not which of these three circumstances should first or most excite my wonder. God a man! God a servant! God an infant! The eternal, immortal Creator of all things, a mortal creature; the sovereign Lord of heaven and earth, a poor slave and servant of men; the Almighty God of infinite wisdom, a weak, puny infant in swaddling-clothes! Heavenly spirits, can you understand this mystery? I must acknowledge that my mind cannot grasp it.

For He be-
came a poor
man.

For, in the first place, where could God have found a meaner nature than ours to take on Himself? I mean, my dear brethren, among those who have an understanding and a will. For although, according to the opinion of theologians, it is not impossible for God to unite to Himself the nature of an unreasoning creature, yet such a union would have been less suitable, nor would it have contributed anything to our redemption. But, I say, among reasoning beings there is nothing more lowly than human nature. For, consider a moment, what is a man? A vessel in which every conceivable misery seems to have taken up its dwelling, as the prophet Job confesses: "Man born of a woman, living for a short time, is filled with many miseries. Who cometh forth like a flower, and is destroyed, and fleeth as a shadow, and never continueth in the same state."¹ Who is subject to as many changes and sicknesses as he has members in his body; sometimes he is strong, sometimes weak; to-day he is in good health, to-morrow sick; at one moment he is too cold, at another too warm; one day he is hungry, another thirsty; one moment he laughs, another he cries: "He never continueth in the same state," but is born to inconstancy, disquiet, labor, fatigue, weariness care, and toil. "And dost thou think it meet to open thy eyes upon such an one?"² asks Job. "What is man that Thou art mindful of him?"³ asks the Prophet David. Oh, truly a miserable, despicable animal that is not worthy of being thought of by

¹ Homo, natus de muliere, brevi vivens tempore, repletur multis miseriis. Qui quasi flos egreditur, et conteritur, et fugit velut umbra, et nunquam in eodem statu permanet.—Job xiv. 1, 2.

² Et dignum ducis super hujusmodi aperire oculus tuos?—Ibid. 3.

³ Quid est homo, quod memor es ejus?—Ps. viii. 5.

the Almighty for a moment! Thy infinite and all-seeing wisdom, O Lord, compels Thee to know all things, even those that are still hidden in their original nothingness, otherwise I should not understand how it is that Thou dost deign even once to think of man! And yet behold, the great God Himself is now become a man like unto ourselves! But, dearest Lord, if it was necessary for Thee to clothe Thyself with a strange nature, couldst and shouldst Thou not have chosen the spirit and nature of one of the noblest and greatest of the angels and princes of heaven? This would have been more suitable for Thy divine majesty; and with one act of Thy will, Thou wouldst have been able to offer an infinite satisfaction to the Father for our redemption. Why then must Thou empty Thyself, in order to clothe Thyself with the beggar's rags, so to speak, of our humanity? No: "He was made man."

And what sort of a man did He become? What were His state and condition? Was He a great king or ruler in the world? Such indeed was the position the blind Jews expected their Messias to assume; such is the condition in which they still hope to see Him. But how they are deceived! Even if He were a king on earth, that dignity would be infinitely unworthy of His majesty; for although kings have authority over countries and peoples, yet they are weak and frail mortals like us. To be a servant, a slave, a thrall: what else is that but to belong to the lowest and most abject state among men? For he who is thus situated has no one under him, but many over him, whose least sign he is bound to obey, and by whom he is ruled, punished, dismissed, rejected, altogether at their good will and pleasure. And even to people of lowly condition that state seems so hard sometimes, that they prefer death to slavery. And yet what is too vile for a worm of earth was good enough for the great God. Behold Him lying there as a man, subject to all the miseries that are wont to assail us men, sin alone excepted. He lies there the meanest of men, a servant and slave. "He emptied Himself," says the Apostle, and lowered Himself so far as to "take the form of a servant;"¹ nor was He merely a servant of God, such as we must all be; but He became a servant of mortal men. While still in the womb of His Mother He was pleased to enter on this office, when at the command of the ambitious Augustus He undertook the journey to Bethlehem in the winter to be enrolled as a subject of that emperor, and to pay him the homage

And even a
servant
amongst
men.

¹ Semetipsum exinanivit, formam servi accipiens.—Phil. ii. 7.

of His submission and service. "He took the form of a servant"¹
—God a slave!

And a little
infant.

What am I now to think and say when I consider Him, more-over, as a little, weak, newly-born infant? Ye heavens, be amazed at this wonderful invention of love! To appear in the world at once as a full-grown man of perfect age, as Adam was created, would still have been unworthy of Him, yet would have been less unbecoming than to enter the world in the form of a child wrapped in swaddling-clothes. My Lord and my God, what a wonderful thing! He whose seat is in the highest heavens, whose throne are the cherubim, whose foot-stool is the earth, He lies in a cradle! He who props up the heavens and the earth with His finger, allows Himself to be wrapped up as a child who has not the use of reason! He who is clad with light as with a garment, as the Prophet David says: Thou "art clothed with light as with a garment,"² is wrapped round with rags! He who, as the Prophet Daniel saw in his ecstasy, has a thousand times a thousand, and ten thousand times a hundred thousand, to wait on Him in heaven³ lies among cattle in a stable! He who by His infinite wisdom governs heaven and earth cries and wails as a little child! He cries to His Mother as a child! He is carried from one place to another like a child! People laugh and play and amuse themselves with Him as with a child! He is nursed by His Mother and sung to sleep, and rocked in a cradle like a child!

A wonder-
ful humilia-
tion.

Who can understand this? I ask again. For my part I must exclaim with St. Cyprian: the whole world, with all the wonders it contains, does not cause me such amazement; the beautiful lights of heaven, the shining stars, the waning moon, the sun rushing on his daily course, the changing seasons that have now lasted for so many thousand years in their wonderful variety, the ebbing and flowing sea, and all the strange and incomprehensible things that the divine wisdom and power have placed before the eyes of men: all these things do not cause me any surprise, for I have learned by my faith a far greater wonder. "The sight of the Lord of the universe lying there neglected and despised," in the manger, "that it is which fills me with astonishment."³ Behold there in the stable of Bethlehem, the in-

¹ *A mictus lumine sicut vestimento.*—Ps. ciii. 2.

² *Milia millium ministrabant ei, et decies milles centena milia assistebant ei.*—Dan. vii. 10.

³ *Illud spectaculum, quo universorum Dominus, ita neglectus despectusque proenabit, hoc me rapuit attonitum.*

Infinite, divine majesty wrapped in swaddling-clothes without a kingdom; omnipotence in a weak child; justice unarmed in the lap of His Mother; omnipresence as it were without a dwelling on earth; eternal wisdom in a cradle, to all appearance at least without reason or understanding; an unknown God. This is what fills me with wonder, and what is far above my comprehension.

Oh, how this puts to shame and confusion the false maxims and principles of the proud, vain world! O ambitious, puffed-up man, thou art invited by St. Gregory to come to this stable, to the crib, to the Child lying therein; behold thy God in that little infant: "The only-begotten Son of God assumed the form of our lowliness that the humble God might teach proud man!"¹ "Already," says St. Bernard, "He calls out by His example what He is afterwards to teach by word: learn of Me because I am meek and humble of heart."² Already the little Infant proclaims from His cradle what He will afterwards preach in the temple. Poor mortal! wilt thou still think great things of thyself? What a foolish thing, continues St. Bernard: "What is more unjust or intolerable than for a man who sees the God of heaven become a little child to try to extol himself, or to imagine himself something great on earth?"

How intolerable, then, the pride of the world!

Sorrowful is the picture the Sacred Scriptures give us of King David, when, persecuted by his son, he had to fly from Jerusalem. With tearful eyes, barefoot and bareheaded, that great monarch went up to the Mount of Olives, while those of his courtiers who had remained faithful to him followed him on foot and in the same humble guise as himself. Imagine now, my dear brethren, that some lackey or stable-boy comes up on a prancing steed, splendidly caparisoned, and thus meets his king; what would you think of such an arrogant act? Would not that lackey be laughed at and ridiculed as a fool? Jesus Christ, incarnate God! oh, how I must be filled with shame in my very heart when I behold Thee so lowly and humble in the stable, while I am trying to make myself great before the world! Thou, great Monarch of heaven, dost lower Thyself to lowly human nature; and I, in my lofty imaginings, am ashamed to seem equal to other men! Thou, O sole Ruler of the world, dost make Thyself the servant and slave of

Shown by a simile.

¹ Unigenitus Dei formam humilitatis nostræ suscepti, ut superbum hominem doceret humilibus Deus.

² Jam clamat exemplo, quod postmodum prædicaturus est verbo: discite a me, quia mitis sum, et humilis corde.

of Thy own creatures; and I, Thy poor slave, make a difficulty about obeying those whom Thou hast set over me! My desire is to rule over others like myself, as their lord. Thou, O God of infinite wisdom, dost become a little infant, rejected by all; and I, Thy miserable creature, wish to be honored, loved, and esteemed by all! Thou, O almighty and all-holy God, allowest Thyself to be wrapped up, to be lifted, carried, set down, as may please others, and dost permit Thyself to be treated like a child that has no strength or power; and I, a poor sinner, cannot and will not bear a word of contradiction, nor humbly pass it over!

Hence the proud have reason to fear that they will have no part with Christ in heaven.

Oh, woe to me if I cannot attain happiness unless I become like to Thee! How carefully I must still labor to acquire the virtue of humility! Truly, my dear brethren, this is made a necessary condition by this very Child: "Amen, I say to you, unless you be converted, and become as little children, you shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven." The new-born Saviour is that little One with whom we must necessarily become little and humble. Fear and tremble, O worldly pride, at the birth of this divine Child; be comforted and consoled, ye little ones, ye who are despised and humiliated in the eyes of the world. For, "whosoever shall humble himself as this little child, he is the greater in the kingdom of heaven."¹ I proceed to the second point, and consider this most poor Lord in His birth: "Let us go over to Bethlehem, and let us see this Word that is come to pass, which the Lord hath showed to us."² Come with me, especially you who are poor, and learn to your consolation to be content in your poverty.

Second Part.

God also chose for Himself that which is poorest: the poorest time in which to be born.

Wherever we turn here, we see, as well as humility, extreme poverty. Poverty in the time at which God was born; poverty in the place in which God was born; poverty in all the circumstances in which God was born. My dear brethren, of all the seasons of the year, which is the poorest, the worst, the most disagreeable? I need not ask you: Is it not the winter time? We know that well enough by our own experience; a strong, healthy man has enough to do to keep from getting sick during

¹ Amen dico vobis, nisi conversi fueritis et efficiamini sicut parvuli, non intrabitis in regnum cœlorum. Quicumque ergo humiliaverit se sicut parvulus iste, hic est major in regno cœlorum.—Matt. xviii. 3, 4.

² Transeamus usque Bethlehem et videamus hoc verbum quod factum est, quod Dominus ostendit nobis.—Luke ii. 15.

that time. The harshness of the weather, the constant changes, the cutting winds, render even the best-humored melancholy and sad. Fields, gardens, vineyards, lie desolate, as if they belonged to no one; and they who have not made provision during the summer must suffer from hunger and want during the winter. Again, which of the two daily changes is the more comfortless and the poorer? Is it not the dark night? Of course; for then men are blind as if they had no eyes; all the beasts lie hidden in their caves, and it seems as if there was not one of them on the face of the earth; little children cry when they awaken out of their sleep, as if every room was filled with ghosts; and sick people sigh for the daylight. Every hour of the night seems a whole year to them. See now, both these miseries of time were chosen by the Lord in His birth; for He came into the world in the middle of winter and in the dark night. Far better off in this respect was our forefather Adam; for as the commentators of Holy Writ tell us, he came into the world in the most agreeable and fruitful time of the year, in the spring, and in the clear light of day moreover. Jesus, our Saviour, the almighty God, who has full power over the course of the sun and the changes of the seasons, could not He have selected a more favorable time also for His birth into the world? Who can doubt of it? But no: it was the miserable winter season, whose harshness, cold, snow, and frost He wished at once to make trial of, and the dark night with its discomforts, that He chose as the time to make His first appearance in this world.

Even that would have been tolerable if that great Lord had found a house and dwelling suitable for Him, in which He might have taken precautions against the piercing cold, and have banished the darkness by means of a light, and have had other comforts. But, O poverty! O humility! little did He think of comforts! For what sort of attendance could He have had in a strange land, without house or home, without field or garden or a handful of earth that He might call His own?—He who neither for money nor entreaties, nor through pity or compassion, could find shelter in which He might enter the world, even in a corner of a house, in a barn, or in the hut of a peasant? “There was no room for them in the inn,”¹ says St. Luke. There is no doubt that Joseph with the poor Mother wandered about the whole evening through the streets of the city of Bethlehem, and

The poorest place in which to be born.

¹ Non erat eis locus in diversorio.—Luke ii. 7.

knocked at the doors of houses to ask for some place to sleep in; but there was no room for them; so they had to pass the night in a hovel, along with animals. Imagine, my dear brethren, that you see in a field, a cave, or a straw hut, such as shepherds use in summer to sleep in, or an empty stable covered with grass and bits of branches, that no one owns, and that is open on all sides to the four winds of heaven, so that it is good for nothing but as a temporary shelter for a peasant's horse. This hut, this stable, where even a dog could not find comfort, is the palace of the King of kings, the throne of the greatest and highest of all monarchs. It has neither chair nor stool, fire nor hearth, flame nor light, bed nor covering, with the exception of the few poor rags that the poorest of mothers brought with her as swaddling-clothes; there is no bed but a handful of straw laid on a block of wood, or in the manger out of which the cattle used to eat. Look at this spectacle; here lying between the ox and the ass, in that wretched hole, exposed to wind and weather, is the eternal Son of God, Jesus Christ, the new-born Saviour and Redeemer of the world. "Look," exclaims Salvianus in an ecstasy of astonishment; "look and see what the Creator of the world has kept for Himself" ¹ out of the whole world!

Wonderful
poverty!

O poor Lord, is it then come to such a pass with Thee, that Thou, who being the Ruler of heaven and earth alone canst say with truth: "The world is Mine, and the fulness thereof" ² —that now Thou canst not point to any beggar who is poorer than Thou? Art Thou so badly off, that in the world created by Thee Thou canst not find as much shelter as is conceded even to the wild beasts? Merciless, cruel earth, is it thus thou treatest thy Maker? Is it thus thou receivest Him whom thou with so many sighs and tears didst entreat for so many ages to come down to thee from heaven? Art thou then all at once become so small and narrow that thou hast no decent place to offer as a shelter to thy Lord at His coming? To murderers and robbers who deserve the wheel and the gallows thou givest proper houses and dwellings; but thou hast not a corner in a barn for the Son of God thy Saviour? With reason, O holy St. Bernard, art thou filled with astonishment; and neither can I understand this mystery. "The son of a shepherd is born," such are the words of

¹ Vide, perpende quid de toto mundo mundi Fabricator reservet sibi.

² Meus est orbis terræ, et plenitudo ejus.—Ps. xlix. 12.

the saint, "and he is laid on a cushion; but the Son of God is born, and He is laid in a manger on a handful of straw."¹ Thankless world! cats and dogs have their proper shelter; thou givest to the wolves, bears, and foxes caves in which to hide themselves; even the meanest worm is provided with a fitting dwelling; but the Saviour of the world cannot obtain from thee room enough to lie down as a man should! Hear what He Himself says: "The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air nests: but the Son of man hath not whereon to lay His head."² O ye kings and princes of earth, where are your courts and palaces? where your silver cradles? your down beds covered with silk and velvet, on which you were born? See your God and Saviour, before whom, great as you are, you must bend the knee; behold Him lying in a stable, in a manger filled with straw!

But He does not want your palaces and splendid cradles. He is poor indeed, and in the extremity of poverty; but it is of His own deliberate free will that He has thus shut Himself out from all human dwellings and been born in a stable; that lot was not the result of a chance misfortune, but of the all-wise arrangement of Divine Providence. In the house of the carpenter at Nazareth, small as it was, He would have found a bed and a warm room; but that comfort seemed too much for Him; and, therefore, the Lord of all so arranged matters that as the time of His birth approached His Mother had to undertake a journey. And although the Ruler of all hearts could easily have moved some one to such a degree of compassion as to have given Him hospitality in Bethlehem, and to have received His Mother into a house, yet all this seemed too costly for His poverty. He wished to put to shame the false opinion of the world, and to show how little earthly things are to be valued, and to point out the road by which we must follow Him to heaven. Now the poor Child calls out to all the world from His crib: "Wo to you that are rich, for you have your consolation."³ Wo to you, unless you are poor with your God, at least in spirit, that is, unless while in possession of your goods and riches you detach your hearts from them; for that, according to the Christian law, is absolutely necessary.

Which He
freely
chose.

¹ *Filius pastoris nascitur, et ei cussinus substernitur; Filius autem Dei nascitur, et in præsepio super foenum reclinator.*

² *Vulpes foveas habent, et volucres cœli nidos; Filius autem hominis non habet ubi caput reclinet.—Matt. viii. 20.*

³ *Vae vobis divitibus, quia habetis consolationem vestram.—Luke vi. 24.*

This should
console all
the poor and
needy.

I conclude with the words of Thomas à Kempis: Rejoice, ye humble, and exult, ye poor, for yours is the kingdom of God if you walk in truth ; that is, if in your poverty and humility you seek God alone in the sincerity of your hearts. What a comfort for you, poor and needy Christians ; what a comfort, I say, to have God as your companion in poverty, and indeed to have Him as the poorest of you all ! Is not this one fact enough to make you at least endure with patience and complete resignation a temporal need for His sake ? Nay, you have rather reason to rejoice and to think yourselves happy, inasmuch as God has conferred the greatest honor on you, in preference to many others, and has chosen you as His companions in poverty. Ah, shame to me ! I esteem myself fortunate when I possess much money, gold, and silver ; when I can array myself in costly apparel ; when I can consult my bodily comfort in all things, and live in plenty. Why ? The general opinion of men helps me to this conclusion ; for they are wont to make much of goods of that kind ; but the God of infinite wisdom, who knows how to appreciate all things at their proper worth and value, cannot succeed in persuading me of the contrary, or inducing me to have a high opinion of poverty, since He Himself chose the very extreme of it in preference to all the goods of earth. Are then blind mortals right, while the almighty God is wrong in all this ? Nay, experience teaches us that men do not hesitate to imitate the faults and failings of the great. Why is that ? Either because they wish to gain the favor of some one in power, or because they think there can be no great wrong in following the example of one who is in a high position. And cannot the example of the great Monarch of heaven and earth make poverty respectable and tolerable ? Must I then be ashamed of imitating God alone, of being like to Him, of living as He lived ? Is it then God's favor alone that I cannot make up my mind to strive for, His footsteps alone that I refuse to walk in, so that I cannot even bear patiently, for His sake, that poverty that I cannot avoid, although He has for my sake borne the extremity of want ? " Being rich, He became poor for your sakes." ¹

Exhortation
and resolu-
tion to ac-
company
Christ in
His poverty.

Father Alvarez of our Society, who was St. Teresa's confessor, used to say that he who loves a person loves also his valued friends and companions ; even our friend's dog we treat kindly ; and he who loves Jesus (and who should not love Him ?) must

¹ Propter vos egenus factus est, cum esset dives.—II. Cor. viii. 9.

also love the dearest friends and companions of Jesus (this is the name he gave to poverty, discomfort, humiliation, and trial); and whenever something disagreeable happened to him he would exclaim: See, there is one of the companions of Our Lord; must I not receive him with joy? So should we too think in future, poor Christians. If secret want or natural inclination presses too hard: behold, here is a friend of Jesus; shall I turn him away with anger and impatience? If I love Jesus, then I must love His dearest friend, poverty; for He was in far greater want than I now am. If the want of food causes us to suffer hunger and thirst; if the cold winter finds us without fuel; if our clothes are torn, our beds hard; if we have to live in a miserable garret that is not even our own: behold, all these things are companions of Jesus, who was not a whit better off, nay, was much worse provided with the necessaries of life than we are. Poor swaddling-clothes, without a bed or a fire or a house, in an open stable in the middle of winter, were His friends; shall I not then receive similar things from Him with joy, if I love Him? Yes, O most poor and loving Saviour, with all my heart! Trying as my poverty seems to me, with Thee and in Thee alone I shall seek comfort; and I shall say with Thy apostle: "I please myself in my infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ."¹ I shall regard it as an honor and happiness that I am and live not otherwise than my God was and lived on earth, humble with the humble God, poor with the poor God. Amen.

FOURTH SERMON.

ON THE CIRCUMCISION OF CHRIST.

Subject.

Jesus in His circumcision is presented to people of all classes as a new year's gift.—*Preached on the Feast of the Circumcision.*

Text.

Ut circumcideretur puer.—Luke ii. 21.

"That the Child should be circumcised."

¹ Placeo mihi in infirmitatibus meis, in contumeliis, in necessitatibus, in persecutionibus, in angustiis pro Christo.—II. Cor. xii. 10.

Introduction.

That no one may be beforehand with me, I now wish each and every one of you, whatever be your state and condition, on this New Year's day, and in all the years that are to come, all imaginable happiness, blessings, and graces that the good God knows to be the best for your last end and eternal salvation. To make this wish effective, I have thought for a long time, and earnestly considered what spiritual present I could give you as the surest means to obtain that happiness. Many things occurred to my mind, until at last I happened to come across and was immediately struck by the words of St. Bernard about our suffering Lord: "What do you seek that you cannot find in Him?"¹ Do you not know the way to a happy life? Jesus is He who has said: "I am the Way, and the Truth, and the Life."² Is the way unknown to you? Jesus is the Guide. Are you overtaken by the dark night? He is the Light in the midst of the darkness. Are you wearied and tired? He is Strength itself. Are you hungry and thirsty? He is your Food and Drink. Are you in doubt or error? He is your best Adviser and Leader. Are you sick? He is your Physician. Jesus is the Comfort of the afflicted, the Help of the abandoned, the Father of the orphan. In a word, He is all in all to us. Therefore I have determined not to seek for anything outside of Him for you; nay, as I thought the matter over, I deemed it unnecessary to go through the whole life of Christ, and the mysteries it contains; for I found in the mystery of to-day, in the little Child that was circumcised on this day, more than enough to serve as a lesson and encouragement for people of all conditions, in order to help them to a happy life. So that I shall now confine myself to this Child.

Plan of Discourse.

*That is, I will propose Jesus in His circumcision as a Model, and by way of a special new year's gift to all classes of people. In this Child the clergy and the laity, the married and the single, the noble and the lowly, great and small shall find, as St. Peter Chrysologus says of Our Lord in the stable of Bethlehem: "In Jesus we have everything we should love, admire, and imitate."**

And may that same Child, through the intercession of His Virgin

¹ Quid queris quod in illo non invenies?

² Ego sum via, et veritas, et vita.—John xiv. 6.

³ Ubi habemus quod amemus, quod demitemur, quod imitemur.—S. Chrsol. serm. 188.

Mother and of all the holy angels, draw our minds and hearts to Himself, that for the remaining years of our lives we may have Him alone before our eyes, and love Him above all things.

The first and chief thing we have to consider and to note in the circumcision of Our Lord, is the office of Redeemer and Saviour of His people. For such is the meaning of the glorious name that was given Him on this day; this contains the end and aim of the incarnation; and this is shown in reality by the circumcision. And in the first place, with regard to the name; because the proper meaning of Jesus is Saviour, as the angel said to Joseph: "Thou shalt call His name Jesus: for He shall save His people from their sins."¹ Secondly, with regard to the end and aim of the incarnation; for the Eternal Father sent His Son upon earth to redeem us from the cruel yoke of the devil, from the bonds of sin, and from everlasting death. Finally He showed Himself a Saviour in reality on this day, as St. Bernard says: "With reason was the Child called Saviour when He was circumcised; for from that time He began to work out our salvation, shedding His immaculate blood for us."² But, O dearest Child and great God, couldst Thou find no other way of being a Saviour to us? Wert Thou obliged to shed for us the few drops of blood that were then in Thy tender body? Would not the first sigh Thou didst send forth to the Eternal Father from Thy cradle out of love for us; one tear shed by Thee when, through pity for us, Thou wert born in the stable: would not these have been more than enough to bring salvation to an infinite number of worlds? Or if the strict justice of God required divine blood as a satisfaction for our sins, why didst Thou not wait for the bloody sweat in the Garden of Gethsemani, for the scourging in Pilate's house, for the crucifixion on Mount Calvary, where whole torrents of Thy sacred blood were poured out? No, my dear brethren, this seemed too long for Jesus Christ to wait; His unheard-of love for His people would not allow Him to rest for such a period; even in His very first entrance into the world, while still a little infant, He wished to show that He was the Saviour and Redeemer of the world. O world, consider this deeply, and see what gratitude, what tender love you owe this Child for His great love of you

Jesus in His
circumcision
is the
Saviour of
His people.

¹ Vocabis nomen ejus Jesum; ipse enim salvum faciet populum suum a peccatis eorum.—Matt. 1. 21.

² Merito sane dum circumciditur puer, salvator vocatur; quod videlicet ex hoc jam cœperit operari salutem nostram, immaculatum illum pro nobis sanguinem fundens.—S. Ber. serm. 2 de Circum.

and your eternal welfare! O thankless world, that cares so little for your Saviour! O wicked world, to be so little concerned for your own salvation, although it cost the blood of the great God!

Introduced
to his High-
ness, the
Prince.

Most excellent Prince and Lord, Archbishop and Elector of this ancient diocese of Treves, our most gracious sovereign: to whom else should I introduce Jesus, in His circumcision, as the Saviour of His people, if not to your Highness? For in olden times they who were placed over the people to govern them were called by the name of saviour, as we read in different parts of the Book of Judges: "They cried to the Lord, who raised them up a saviour called Aod, the son of Gera."¹ In the same way, when the children of Israel were hard pressed by the king of Syria, they appealed to Heaven: "And the Lord gave Israel a saviour, and they were delivered out of the hand of the king of Syria."² And elsewhere in the Scripture we read: "And in the time of their tribulation they cried to Thee, and Thou heardest them from heaven, and according to the multitude of Thy tender mercies Thou gavest them saviours to save them from the hands of their enemies."³ The same name was given to Gedeon, Josue, Samson, David, and many others, since they protected their people from their enemies. If, I say, that is the case, then with good reason may we call your Highness a saviour; for it is to you that the Almighty says, as it were, what Pharao said to Joseph: "Behold, I have appointed thee over the whole land of Egypt." This I change and say: over the whole land of Treves. "Without thy commandment no man shall move hand or foot in all the land. And he turned his name, and called him the saviour of the world."⁴ I say of the world of Treves, that by your innate prudence, wisdom, mildness, and beneficence its salvation and welfare may be secured and promoted. And truly to what other end tend your Highness's diligent care, wise counsels, zealous exhortations, constant vigilance, prudent dispositions, strict inquiries that the different charges may be duly seen to, the offices filled with fitting persons, justice respected by all, vice abolished,

¹ Clamaverunt ad Dominum, qui suscitavit eis salvatorem vocabulo Aod, filium Gera.—Judges iii. 15.

² Et dedit Dominus salvatorem Israeli, et liberatus est de manu regis Syriae.—IV. Kings xiii. 5.

³ In tempore tribulationis sue clamaverunt ad te, et tu de coelo audisti, et secundum miserationes tuas multas dedisti eis salvatores, qui salvarent eos de manu hostium suorum.—II. Es. ix. 27.

⁴ Ecce, constitui te super universam terram Ægypti. Absque tuo imperio non movebit quisquam manum aut pedem. Vertitque nomen ejus, et vocavit eum, salvatorem mundi.—Gen. xli. 41, 44, 45.

peace preserved, the public debt paid off, and all be safe from their enemies; to what end, I say, does all this tend, if not to the general good, to the welfare of the noble land that is subject to your Highness? It is to you that hitherto so many sighs and wishes have been sent forth by your subjects, that they might be heard and received by you as by a long wished-for saviour. It seems to me that, in these troublous times, they say to your Highness what the Egyptians said in the famine to Joseph: "Our life is in thy hand: only let my lord look favorably upon us, and we will gladly serve."¹ Oh, may we have the happiness of having your Highness for many long years as our saviour! Then' we will gladly serve. Graciously accept, then, illustrious Prince, this Model I offer you with all respect, and continue to imitate Jesus as a saviour of your people, in the assured hope that Jesus will be at all times your Saviour, as your Highness is the saviour of your subjects. In this desire I am heartily joined by the whole land of Treves, and we all wish you constant good luck and happiness here on earth and eternal happiness in heaven.

Another office that Jesus Christ filled in His circumcision was that of high-priest; for He came into the world to offer to the great God the only sacrifice becoming and worthy of Him. For He says to His Father in the psalm: "Sacrifice and oblation Thou didst not desire. Burnt-offering and sin-offering Thou didst not require." Thou hast no pleasure in or wish for the flesh of oxen, calves, and goats, such as men have hitherto sacrificed to Thee. "Then said I: Behold I come;" here I am as an acceptable offering to Thee.² Behold, O heavenly Father, I offer Thee for the sins of the world, not the blood of sheep or goats, but My own blood, the blood of Thy Son, who is God equal to Thee. This, my dear brethren, was the morning sacrifice that Jesus offered in the beginning of His life, as a forerunner of the great sacrifice of the cross, that was to follow in the evening of His life. With all the respect due to your position, Very Reverend and Reverend members of the clergy, canons, deans, prelates, and other dignitaries of this archdiocese, I now present to you the High-Priest Jesus in His circumcision as your Pattern and Model. You are they whom Jesus has chosen in preference to many others as His helpers and followers in the high-priesthood, that you may offer to

Jesus the
High-Priest
presented to
the Rever-
end Canons.

¹ *Salus nostra in manu tua est: respiciat nos tantum dominus noster, et læti serviemus.*—Gen. xlvii. 25.

² *Sacrificium et oblationem noluisti. Holocaustum et pro peccato non postulasti. Tunc dixi: Ecce venio.*—Ps. xxxix. 7, 8.

God on the altar the same divine blood. How great this dignity is may be explained, not by men, but by the angels and spirits of heaven, who behold in amazement and, as it were, with envy the sublime office entrusted to you. What your state requires you doubtless know much better than I can tell you, nor do you want instruction from me on that point. Only look at Jesus the High-Priest as He is described by St. Paul: "For it was fitting that we should have such a High-Priest, holy, innocent, undefiled; separated from sinners, and made higher than the heavens."¹ All these words have a special force of their own. A high-priest should, as far as he can, lead a holy, innocent, spotless life. He should be separated from sinners. The more they who are invested with ecclesiastical dignities are ennobled and raised above others, the more should they be separated from sinners, with whom they should have nothing in common. For, says St. Chrysostom, "the higher the dignity, the greater the punishment of those who sin."² Finally, he must be "made higher than the heavens," that is, as St. Ambrose writes to Irenæus, there must be nothing common or earthly in a prelate, nothing resembling the usual customs of the world; for, says the saint, "how can he be esteemed by the people who has nothing to distinguish him from the people? How can they admire you if they see in you, whom they look on as reverend, that which they themselves would be ashamed of?"³ I wish, Very Reverend and Reverend Sirs, that you may continue to lead that kind of life for many years for the good of the Church, for the temporal renown of your state, and for the eternal welfare of your souls.

As the Holy
One of God,
to the
clergy.

According to Cornelius à Lapide, circumcision was a mark by which the Hebrews were distinguished from all other people, and consecrated and sanctified to God alone; hence they were wont to call other nations that were not so marked by the contemptuous name of uncircumcised, banished and rejected from the royal palace. But the proper name of the Jews was, the people of God, a people set apart for and belonging to the great God in a special manner; and therefore Jesus did not wish to separate Himself from the people of God. This Jesus, then, sanctified and consecrated

¹ Talis enim decebat ut nobis esset pontifex, sanctus, innocens, impollutus, segregatus a peccatoribus, et excelsois cœlis factus.—Heb. vii. 26.

² Quo major est autoritas, eo est gravius eorum, qui peccant, supplicium.—S. Chrys. in Ps. vi.

³ Quomodo enim potest observari a populo, qui nihil habet secretum a populo? Quid in te miretur, si, quæ in se erubescit, in te, quem reverendum arbitrat, offendat?—S. Amb. Ep. 6, ad Iren.

to God in His circumcision, I now present to all the venerable clergy, and to all those who are invested with spiritual offices, that is, to all the priesthood and clergy, whom I consider and call a people chosen for the Church and consecrated to God: "A chosen generation, a kingly priesthood, a holy nation, a purchased people."¹ Holy is your spiritual vocation, which calls you from the turmoil of the world, from temporal cares, and makes you intimate friends and domestics of God at the table of Christ, by whose inheritance you are fed. Holy is the duty you have to perform: for holy is the Mass you offer; the Holy of holies is Jesus Christ, whom you take in your hands on the altar; holy is His flesh and blood that you receive; holy the word of God that you announce to the people; holy the sacraments you administer to them. In a word, everything is holy that you have to do with in your vocation; all that is in you is consecrated to God and devoted to His service; therefore every one of you, much more than the priests of the Old Law, who were only a shadow of our priesthood, can be called by that honorable title, "a man of God." O holy state of the priesthood! oh, what have I done, good God, that Thou shouldst raise a poor sinner like me to such a sublime state! But alas! woe to me if I do not live according to my holy vocation, if I am not holy in my whole conduct and conversation, as Thou commandest me: "According to him that hath called you, who is holy, be you also in all manner of conversation holy. Because it is written: You shall be holy, for I am holy."² Woe to me if I, who am consecrated altogether to Thy service, should serve anyone except Thee! Woe to me if I, who should be a man of God, were to become a man of sin! Woe to me if, instead of offering daily the holy sacrifice to Thee, my God, I were to sacrifice to the vile flesh! Woe to me if I, whose daily food is the Bread of angels, should satiate myself with the husks of swine! Woe to me whose hand so often touches Thy precious blood on the altar, if I should be in the number of those of whom St. Bernard says: *Qui audent Agni immaculati sacras carnes contingere, et intingere in sanguine manus nefarias, quibus paulo ante carne meretricias attraxerunt*; this is plain enough for those whom it concerns. Woe to me if my heart, into which Jesus so often enters, ever becomes ensnared by an un-

¹ Genus electum, regale sacerdotium, gens sancta, populus acquisitionis.—I. Pet. II. 9.

² Secundum eum qui vocavit vos sanctum, et ipse in omni conversatione sancti sitis. Quoniam scriptum est: Sancti eritis, quoniam ego sanctus sum.—I. Pet. I. 15, 16.

lawful passion! Wo to me if I, who have to preach to others, and to bring souls to Christ into heaven, should myself go to hell, and by my sinful life and bad example steal from the Son of God the souls He bought so dearly, and bring them to eternal ruin! Ah, dear Lord, save me and all the clergy from this! Grant that we may all spend all the days and years of our lives, and all the powers of our bodies and souls, in Thy service alone.

As a Zelator
for the
divine law,
to the laity.

I come now to the civil authorities—courtiers, privy councillors, mayors, and all the councillors of this city; and I present to them Jesus in His circumcision as a zelator for the law of God. The law of circumcision was hard and grievous to obey; Jesus Christ was in no way subject to it, because He was God the Law-giver Himself, who never had the least part in the curse of original sin; nay, in His case, as He was the Saviour of the world, circumcision seemed to be altogether unbecoming. Nevertheless, as if He were the poorest and most miserable sinner on earth, He wished to submit to it in order to show how anxious He was for the fulfilment of the will of His heavenly Father, and for the observance and defence of the divine law. Even as a Child He wished to prove what He said afterwards: “Do not think that I am come to destroy the law or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil.”¹ Gentlemen, this Saviour, who is so zealous for the law, should never be out of your hearts and minds. For if zeal for the law does not direct your pens, your counsels, your orders and commands, in a word, if in all the business and charges you have to attend to you have no zeal for the law of God, oh, then I pity those poor people who are subject to you; then it is all up with the prosperity of the land and the city! Because it is on you that the well-being of the community mostly depends; it is for you to see whether vice is punished or not, whether each one has his right or not; whether widows and orphans are protected or persecuted; whether the laws of the land, nay, the commandments of God, are observed or not. All this depends almost completely on you. For the sovereign cannot be everywhere at once; he sees only what comes before his eyes; he hears only what makes a sound in his ears; he knows nothing of his subjects, and of their affairs, unless what you tell him; so that he has thrown aside the great burden from his own shoulders, and placed it on

¹ Nolite putare quoniam veni solvere legem aut prophetas; non veni solvere, sed adimplere.
—Matt. v. 17.

yours, that you may share with him the care for the welfare of your common fatherland; and thus he has, as it were, placed his responsibility and his conscience in your hands, and entrusted himself and those under his care to your fidelity, your diligence, your conscience; you are, so to speak, his eyes, his ears, his hands, his feet. See then and weigh well the weighty charge entrusted to you. Oh, how much good you might do if you chose! And what evil you might work if you were so minded! If you are careless of your duty, more eager for making money or gaining the esteem of men than for the law and justice, wo to you! The great God will one day demand the sweat of your subjects and their souls at your hands. "Wo to you, ungodly men," threatens the Lord by the wise Ecclesiasticus, "who have forsaken the law of the most high Lord;...if you die, in malediction shall be your portion."¹ On the other hand, how you will promote the honor and glory of God, and what comfort and merit you will gain for your own souls, if one day you will be able to say with truth in the words of the Prophet David: "I have hated the unjust, and have loved Thy law."² "My soul is continually in my hands, and I have not forgotten Thy law."³ In my hands I have not suffered bribes to rest, in my eyes not had respect to persons, or considered whether they were rich or poor; I have not kept silent when it was time to speak; but "my soul is continually in my hands," and my care has been to see that its welfare was provided for. "The law of Thy mouth is good to me, above thousands of gold and silver."⁴ Act thus, gentlemen; keep fast to this,—and indeed I have no reason to think that you have done anything else hitherto—then you will never have an unhappy day in the whole year.

The subject-matter of my sermon hitherto treated of deserves more consideration; but I must pass on to other classes of people, that they too may learn something. I present, then, to all married people, Jesus in His circumcision as suffering and mortified in the extreme, but at the same time most patient. The suffering and mortified Jesus, I say; for what pain must not the tender Child Jesus have felt, under what commentators tell us was a rude knife of stone, and the sufferings of Our Lord on the oc-

Jesus the Patient, so married people.

¹ *Vae vobis, viri impii, qui dereliquistis legem Domini altissimi, . . . si mortui fueritis, in maledictione erit pars vestra.*—Ecclesiasticus. xii. 11, 12.

² *Iniquos odio habui, et legem tuam dilexi.*—Ps. cxviii. 113.

³ *Anima mea in manibus meis semper, et legem tuam non sum oblitus.*—Ibid. 109.

⁴ *Bonum mihi lex oris tui, super millia auri et argenti.*—Ibid. 72.

casian must have been all the greater, since He had the full use of reason, and foresaw the pain, and voluntarily accepted it. Yet how patiently He bore it, although there was no law, human or divine, to compel Him to submit to it! O ye married people! consider this patient Child, and imitate Him whenever you have mortification or trials to endure, and to my mind there is no lack of them in your state; nay, you must have them daily and hourly. You know that yourselves better than I or any one else can tell you; you find, by daily experience, how true is the threat of the Lord to Eve after her sin: "I will multiply thy sorrows."¹ You know, after having lived a few years together, that the words of the Apostle come true: "Such shall have tribulation of the flesh."² If they wish to marry, let them do so in the name of God; but they will have tribulations to suffer. And how can it be otherwise? For sometimes people of quite different dispositions come together, and their first love grows cold; or both are of a quarrelsome, obstinate, suspicious, or jealous character; or the housekeeping is not a success; or the business does not get on well; or the children are not all as healthy and well-formed as might be wished; or else servants give trouble by their obstinacy, laziness, and trickery of all sorts; while with all this there may come sickness, or even premature death, to say nothing of other trials, annoyances, crosses, mortifications, and miseries, that often last from early morning till late at night. How often must not the husband give way and appear not to see things? How often must not the wife keep silence, do what she is most unwilling to do, omit what she would most willingly do, for the sake of peace and quiet? If, under those circumstances, there is not a good supply of steady and courageous Christian patience, oh, truly the married state is then a most wretched one, a hell on earth! Patience, patience, O married people, with the patient Jesus! It is the only advice I can give you. I can readily imagine that some think I am exaggerating when I say that this state is so full of crosses and trials, and when I speak of the patience it requires, for they picture it to themselves in far different colors, and make or promise to themselves a sort of heaven on earth in the married life, or even imagine they already possess that heaven. I wish them joy with all my heart, and may God grant that they may live in that happiness and love and harmony for many years.

¹ Multiplicabo ærumnas tuas.—Gen. iii. 16.

² Tribulationem tamen carnis habebunt hujusmodi.—I. Cor. vii. 28.

And good reason they have to thank God every day for having blessed them to such an extent; yet they, too, should lay in a stock of patience for the trials that may come upon them in the future, and if they live to a ripe old age, they will certainly not be without them. At all events, they should mortify themselves in other things for the sake of the suffering and patient Jesus in His circumcision; so that after having passed their lives together in love and happiness, they may merit to rejoice together in eternity.

And now I come to the unmarried state, which, on account of its dignity, should have been mentioned before the other. For, according to St. Paschasius, this state yields in dignity to none but the priesthood. You will not take it ill of me that I have given the preference to your parents; besides, I dare not speak to you as I did to them, of shedding your blood, of crosses, trials, mortifications, and patience; for if I did so, I should not hope that you would listen to me very willingly. Much more agreeable must your present be, namely, Jesus in His circumcision as your Spouse. To Him, O virgins, turn your thoughts, your hearts, and your love. Look at that Spouse of whom the bride in the Canticle sings: "My beloved is white and ruddy, chosen out of thousands."¹ His beauty is so excellent that the angels rejoice at the sight of His countenance. He is the Bridegroom of whom it is written in the fourth chapter of Exodus: "A bloody Spouse art Thou to me,"² for in this day He plights His eternal troth to you with His own blood. He is a Bridegroom who brings to His spouse eternal riches and heavenly joys and delights as a bridal present. To Him should your hearts and desires always turn; you may be always sure of His favor and love, if you wish; you need not fear that His conversation will ever weary you, for He it is of whom St. Agnes said: "If I love Christ, I injure not my purity; if I touch Him, I am still chaste; if I espouse Him, I still remain a virgin." If you choose Him for yourselves, you need not fear unhappy days, nor gloomy hours, nor troubles, nor difficulties such as are found in the married state. If you remain true to Him, you can with good reason congratulate yourselves that you have chosen the best and happiest state on earth. Hear what St. Chrysostom says: "As the angels exceed men, so does virginity exceed matrimony."³ Nay,

Jesus the Spouse, to the unmarried.

¹ Dilectus meus candidus et rubicundus, electus ex millibus.—Cant. v. 10.

² Sponsus sanguinum tu mihi es.—Ex. iv. 25.

³ Quantum angeli antecellunt homines, tanto virginitas nuptias.

Christ actually calls you angels: "They shall neither marry nor be married: but shall be as the angels of God in heaven."¹ If you remain faithful to this state and keep your troth with Jesus, you will one day be like those queens who, as St. Ambrose believes, shall follow the divine Lamb, while the others must be satisfied with coming after Him at a long distance, as we read in the Apocalypse of St. John about virgins: "These follow the Lamb whithersoever He goeth . . . for they are without spot before the throne of God."² Now, if you who are unmarried wish to ensure to yourselves the possession of this happiness, you must observe constant, inviolable fidelity towards Jesus, and fight for your purity to blood, even to death. For your Spouse is He who, as the bride says in the Canticle, "feedeth among the lilies."³ He cannot endure the least stain; He must have the heart pure and spotless for Himself alone. To Jesus, then, direct your sighs, your desires, your longings, your love. If you are assailed by temptation, if the impure spirit attack you, fly to Jesus for refuge; His most precious blood will keep you pure, will put to flight the most shameless plotter against your innocence, and will preserve you safe against all attacks. Oh, with what joy you will one day hear, at the end of your lives, the voice calling out: "Behold the Bridegroom cometh!"⁴ With what comfort of heart you will then be received by Him! With what joy and exultation you will enter with Him into the marriage-feast of heaven!

Jesus the
Humbled
and Exalt-
ed, to
widows.

To widows and orphans, and to all who are oppressed and in poverty, I present Jesus in His circumcision as exceedingly humbled, and at the same time exceedingly exalted. That the great God should become a man like to us is a most wonderful thing; that the God of infinite wisdom should be in His birth a little infant is still more astonishing; but that the God of all holiness should allow Himself to be circumcised is even beyond our comprehension. For He thus took on Himself the person of a sinner, bound in the fetters of the demon, and devoted to eternal death, since in former times circumcision freed from original sin, just as baptism does now. A humiliation of that kind was never witnessed in Our Lord in His after life. A great comfort for

¹ Neque nubent neque nubentur; sed erunt sicut angeli Dei in caelo.—Matt. xxii. 30.

² Sequuntur Agnum quocumque ferit . . . sine macula enim sunt ante thronum Dei.—Apoc. xiv. 4, 5.

³ Qui pascitur inter lilia.—Cant. ii. 16.

⁴ Ecce sponsus venit!—Matt. xxv. 6.

you, desolate, afflicted widows and orphans. You are now humbled and abandoned on all sides, forgotten by the world, and oppressed and persecuted by the mighty. Be satisfied and of good heart; Jesus your Saviour was no better off; only tell Him your wants, for He calls Himself your Father and Judge: "He doth judgment to the fatherless and the widow."¹ From Him you will obtain strength and consolation; and in a short time your exaltation shall follow on your humiliation. For in His circumcision Jesus was exceedingly humbled: "His name was called Jesus."² "He humbled Himself," says St. Paul, "for which cause God also hath exalted Him, and hath given Him a name which is above all names: that in the name of Jesus every knee should bow of those that are in heaven, on earth, and under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that the Lord Jesus Christ is in the glory of God the Father."³ Such is the way in which the Almighty acts; He mingles the sour with the sweet, and sorrow with joy. Only have patience for a little while with your humbled Saviour; for His sake bear your desolation or whatever other affliction oppresses you; your tears will soon be turned into laughter, your humiliation into exaltation, your oppression into glory and honor. For what the same Saviour has said must come true: "He that shall humble himself shall be exalted."⁴

To young men I present an object for their love. But what am I saying? Are not many of them already more than sufficiently supplied in that way? Why should I try to excite to love those who are already only too much inclined to it? But now I do not allude to the love that some are perhaps enchained by to such a degree that they seal themselves with their heart's blood to some perishable creature. I present to them a far different, a holy Lover, from whom they may learn what and how they should love: Jesus, namely, in His circumcision, the true Lover. And what does He love? Souls; your souls. How does He love them? Even to shedding His blood. Why? That He may move you to love Him and your own souls. And is not He more worthy of your affection and love, your labor and trouble, your service and obe-

Jesus as a
Lover, to
young men.

¹ *Facit judicium pupillo et viduæ.—Deut. x. 18.*

² *Vocatum est nomen ejus Jesus.—Luke ii. 21.*

³ *Humillavit semetipsum. Propter quod et Deus exaltavit illum, et donavit illi nomen, quod est super omne nomen; ut in nomine Jesu omne genu flectatur coelestium, terrestrium, et infernorum, et omnis lingua confiteatur, quia Dominus Jesus Christus in gloria est Dei Patris.—Philipp. ii. 8-11.*

⁴ *Qui se humilaverit, exaltabitur.—Matt. xxiii. 12.*

dience, than the mortal creature to whom you give that service, love, and affection now at the cost of your soul's salvation? Mark this: in the very beginning of His infancy, Jesus Christ gives for you His blood; but you wish to consecrate to the flesh and the devil the best years of your lives, while you keep for God nothing but your feeble old age, your wearied limbs, when your blood runs cold in your veins, and you are no longer capable of serving the devil. I hope for something better from you. Love, then, and love with all your hearts Jesus your Saviour; by that love and by no other you will arrive at that place where you will love your God forever in endless bliss.

Jesus the
obedient
Servant, to
servants.

To servants and laborers I present Jesus in His circumcision as an obedient Servant, of whom the Apostle says: "Who being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a servant."¹ "The Son of man," He says of Himself, "is not come to be ministered unto, but to minister."² An obedient Servant, I say; for the circumcision was a figure of the perfect obedience of Abraham when about to sacrifice his son; and therefore the law commanded that children should be circumcised on the eighth day to consecrate them to the Lord God. Jesus observed this time exactly, and presented Himself on the eighth day—neither sooner nor later. Oh, what a comfort for you; for the great God Himself has not hesitated to act the part of a servant! Be not afflicted, then, at having to serve others here below: "The servant is not greater than his lord."³ Only be obedient to your masters' least sign, as long as they do not command anything contrary to the law of God; perform your work willingly, diligently, and skillfully; God Himself will be your reward. The wage you now receive is small and mean indeed. O my poor people! poor indeed, if you work for that alone, if you have no higher aim or object in your labor. Ah, do not forget the good intention! Serve your worldly masters for the love of Jesus Christ, and you will have to rejoice in the possession of an eternal, exceeding great wage from God. But be careful that you do not become servants of sin, slaves of the devil. Oh, what an unhappy servitude that is! But if you have a good conscience, if you love God sincerely, then although you are servants of men, you are nobles

¹ Qui cum in forma Dei esset, non rapinam arbitratus est esse se æqualem Deo; sed semetipsum exinanivit, formam servi accipiens.—Philipp. ii. 6, 7.

² Filius hominis non venit ministrari, sed ministrare.—Matt. xx. 28.

³ Non est servus major domino suo.—John xiii. 16.

in the sight of God, you are friends of God, children of God, heirs of God, who in eternity shall be like to the sovereign God Himself.

And have I now come to the end of my new year's gifts? No, Jesus a seeming sinner, to sinners. for sinners have to be thought of still; they too must receive Jesus as a present for the new year. Wait, ye sinners! Do not run away! Do not be afraid when you hear the name of Jesus! For He does not now fulfil the duty of Judge who comes to punish and condemn you on account of your vices. I present to you Jesus as a Child, whose little hands cannot wield the thunder-bolt; Jesus as your Friend, who associates with you, O sinners, as your Comrade and Friend; Jesus in His circumcision—who can believe it? Disguised as a sinner, making His appearance in the form of a sinner, as if He were under the ban like other men, and were obliged to submit to circumcision as a means of freeing Himself from original sin, that you who are sinners in reality may, by the humility and suffering of Jesus, be moved to repent of your crimes, to amend your lives, and to live henceforward in true friendship with Him. See how He stretches forth His hands to you, to receive you if you wish to return! His precious blood which He now sheds cries to heaven for mercy for you, and He offers it to His heavenly Father as an atonement for your sins. Ah, come, come, be converted, O sinners! Do not be so foolhardy with your God, so merciless to your own souls. Have you not served the devil long enough? Must this year too be passed in hatred and enmity between God and you? Oh, wo to you! I fear that the thunder-bolt will strike you yet! Oh, unhappy hours, unhappy days, unhappy years, that you are minded still to spend in sin! But why do I speak of years? Perhaps this is the last year, the last day, on which God in His inscrutable decrees has determined to take you out of life, and to condemn you to hell on account of your wickedness and impenitence. Wo to you, then! "Time shall be no longer."¹ I cannot promise you a single day, nor if you persist in your evil ways, can I wish you a happy new year. For as there is no better, happier, quieter life on earth than to possess God in a good conscience, and to enjoy His grace and friendship, so, on the other hand, there is no more miserable or wretched life than to be the enemy of God and in the state of sin.

Now, my dear brethren, I have come to the end of my presents **Conclusion**

¹ Tempus non erit amplius.—Apoc. x. 6.

to serve
Jesus alone
in future.

for the new year, and all I ask of you is that each and every one of you, according to his state, may for this year, and all the years that are to come, always keep Jesus before his eyes as his Model, and imitate Him constantly. That you must do if you wish to have happy years here, and exceedingly happy years hereafter in eternity. Yes, O Jesus, such shall be and remain our fast and firm determination! I will make a beginning with it, along with sinners, to whom alas, I more properly belong, and I will cast myself at Thy feet, O my Saviour, who wast pleased on this day to pass as a sinner, that Thou mightest give me courage to confess my sins honestly and repent of them sincerely. Behold, O Lord, Thou hast me in Thy hands! O my God! how have I lived hitherto? How shamefully I have treated Thee! I have now spent so many years on earth, and I can hardly find a day, an hour even, in which I have served Thee as I ought, a day, an hour, that has not been wasted in wickedness. How hast Thou been able to bear with my ingratitude so patiently for so long a time? Alas for me, poor, unhappy mortal that I am! If Thou hadst, as Thou mightest have done, taken me out of the world in that evil state, where should I be now? I am sorry, O Lord! Ah, who will give me back the time I have squandered so foolishly and wasted in sin? But it is gone, and gone forever. Now at least I am determined that in future no day nor moment that Thou mayest grant me will pass by without being employed in Thy service. "I will recount to Thee all my years in the bitterness of my soul."¹ I will make a diligent examen of my sins, and repent of them with my whole heart, and confess them candidly, and by true repentance and amendment regulate my life, in future, according to Thy holy law. All that I ever do shall be Thine, and shall be devoted to Thee; to Thee I give my heart, my soul, my body, and my whole being. Whatever my eyes shall see, my tongue speak, my hands perform, shall be directed to Thy honor, to make reparation for the insults I have offered Thee in the past, to blotting out the punishment still due for my sins, and to the praise and glory of Thy divine majesty. Make this resolution with me, my dear brethren, and if we keep it, then indeed will this new year be a happy one for us; it will be the earnest of a happy life and a happy eternity. Amen.

¹ *Recogitabo tibi omnes annos meos in amaritudine animæ meæ.—Is. xxxviii. 15.*

FIFTH SERMON.

ON THE MANIFESTATION OF CHRIST TO THE GENTILES.

Subject.

1. The Child Christ by calling the three kings shows that He is the almighty God and the Ruler of hearts. 2. How hard the hearts of men who refuse to respond to the call of such a mighty God!—*Preached on the Feast of the Epiphany.*

Text.

Vidimus enim stellam ejus in Oriente, et venimus adorare eum.
—Matt. ii. 2.

“ For we have seen His star in the East, and are come to adore Him.”

Introduction.

Kings invested with royal power, following the mere sign of a star, undertake a tiresome journey to visit a Child whom they did not know how or where to find; and when they found Him in a poor stable, they adored Him on bended knee. A rare and wonderful circumstance, my dear brethren. When I consider it, I cannot sufficiently admire, on the one hand, the power of the new-born Child, who was thus able to draw three kings to Himself; and, on the other, the ready obedience of the kings, who were thus easily drawn. There is no doubt that by this fact the Child shows clearly that He is the almighty God and the Ruler of hearts; from which it follows that they must have hearts of stone who refuse to follow the invitation of such a God. Both I mean to prove in this sermon.

Plan of Discourse.

The Child Christ, in the calling of the three kings, is a mighty God and the Ruler of hearts; the first part. Hard hearts of men who do not respond to the call of such a God; the second part. The first to the honor and glory of Jesus Christ and the three holy kings; the second to our salutary confusion and warning.

New-born Saviour, mighty King of hearts, draw the hearts of us all to Thyself, that after the example of the three kings we

may always readily obey Thy star when it calls us! This we beg of Thee through the intercession of Thy virginal Mother Mary and of our holy guardian angels.

No king is easily induced to humble himself before another king.

When has the world ever heard of a king being induced to visit another king like himself, with the sole object of humbling himself on bended knee, and laying his crown at the feet of the latter? We read in Holy Writ, and in profane history too, of kings and emperors who were so humiliated as to be obliged to perform the lowliest offices for their conquerors. Thus Sedecias, the king of the Israelites, was compelled to stand before Nabuchodonosor, the king of Babylon, like a poor criminal, to hear his sentence: "They took the king, and brought him to the king of Babylon, . . . and he gave judgment upon him."¹ The Book of Kings tells us of seventy kings whose hands and feet were cut off, and who were compelled to lick the crumbs off the floor under the table of Adonibezec, as the latter himself acknowledged: "And Adonibezec said: Seventy kings having their fingers and toes cut off, gathered up the leavings of the meat under my table."² Tamerlane, the Tartar king, caused Bajazet, the first sultan of the name, to be shut up in an iron cage, and to be carried about for show. The emperor Valerian had to serve Sapor, the king of Persia, as a foot-stool when the latter mounted his horse. What a disgraceful humiliation for such monarchs! But what we have to wonder at here is, not the degradation of those kings, for it was not voluntary on their part; but rather the arrogance and cruelty of the conquerors, who compelled their poor prisoners to perform such degrading services against their will. Certainly Bajazet was so mortified at the treatment he experienced that, filled with rage and indignation, he put an end to himself by beating out his brains against the iron bars of his cage. It was a queen of Saba who, having heard of the wonderful wisdom of Solomon, voluntarily, and of her own accord, set out to see him in person, and she brought him magnificent presents as a sign of her esteem. "And entering into Jerusalem with a great train, and riches, and camels that carried spices, and an immense quantity of gold and precious stones, she came to King Solomon." And for what purpose? What did she wish to do? Was it, perhaps, to bend the knee before him,

¹ Apprehensum ergo regem duxerunt ad regem Babylonis, . . . qui locutus est cum eo iudicium.—IV. Kings xxv. 6.

² Dixitque Adonibezec: Septuaginta reges, amputatis manuum et pedum, summitatibus, colligebant sub mensa mea ciborum reliquias.—Judges 1. 7.

and show him reverence? Not at all. And what then? "The queen of Saba," says the Scriptures, "having heard of the fame of Solomon, came to try him with hard questions." ¹ Mark, says St. Augustine, "how she came, not to worship the speaking man, but to hear him." ² There was no question of her humbling herself, but rather of gratifying her curiosity, and seeing the greatness of his palace, the beauty of the buildings, the splendid gardens, the multitude and order of the courtiers, ministers, and satellites; and to find out whether Solomon was in reality the great king he was reported to be. But I repeat, never, as long as the world has lasted, has there been seen a king who, of his own accord, has gone to visit another king in order to bend the knee before him and do him homage.

Jesus Christ, the new-born Infant, is that Lord of hearts who has such power over the kings of earth, even while He is still in the cradle, that He can bring those three kings out of the East, that they may offer Him their homage and humble service. And how did He do that? He merely gave them a sign, and nothing more, to show that He was born into the world, and at once these kings set out, left their kingdoms and countries, and went in search of the new-born Child. What was the sign? What indication was given of His birth? When in former times the Lord wished the Patriarch Abraham to leave his house and home, and to go into a foreign country, He came Himself and gave him a positive command: "And the Lord said to Abram: Go forth out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and out of thy father's house, and come into the land which I shall show thee." ³ Abraham obeyed, but there was not much difficulty in that. For how could he have opposed the command of God, speaking to him and actually pointing out the land to him? Christ in His birth called the shepherds out of the fields, and they came; but neither was that wonderful, for they had received a message from heaven announcing the news of the birth of the Saviour of the world, and the angels showed them, at the same time, the place where they would find Him: "And behold, an angel of the Lord stood by them, and the brightness of God shone round about them;" and

Jesus showed His supreme power over the hearts of men in calling the three wise kings to Himself by the star.

¹ *Ingressa Jerusalem multo cum comitatu et divit'is, camelis portantibus aromata et aurum infinitum nimis et gemmas pretiosas, venit ad regem Salomonem. Regina Saba, audita fama Salomonis, venit tentare eum in enigmatibus.—III. Kings x. 2, 1.*

² *Loquentem hominem non adorare venit, sed audire.*

³ *Dixit autem Dominus ad Abram: Egredere de terra tua, et de cognatione tua, et de domo patris tui, et veni in terram quam monstrabo tibi.—Gen. xii. 1.*

the angel said to them in plain words: "This day is born to you a Saviour, who is Christ the Lord, in the city of David."¹ There was no announcement of the kind made to the three kings; neither God nor an angel said anything to them about Christ, or told them to seek Him. All they saw was a dim and, indeed, unreliable sign in the heavens, from which they concluded that somewhere or other a new king of the Jews must be born: "We have seen His star." A star? And was that all? Their courtiers and ministers had good reason to say to them, and perhaps they did say too: Will you then undertake such a long journey and run such risks on the faith of such a sign as that? How can the star signify that a king of the Jews is born? How many stars and fires are seen in the air at different times, and will be seen in future, and no reasonable man has ever said, or will say, that it signifies the birth of a king of the Jews? And how you will be laughed at when, after having travelled over mountains, rivers, and deserts in search of this new-born king, you will not succeed in finding him! What a disgrace for the kings of the East it will be when the people will say of them: they saw some inflammable vapor in the sky in the shape of a star, and took it for a tongue from heaven, and at once they went off in search of a new-born king! So might these courtiers have spoken, and such thoughts might, indeed, easily have occurred to the kings themselves. But better thoughts were inspired by the Ruler of hearts, who called them to Himself by the star. "There is no doubt," says St. Leo, "that a divine inspiration enlightened their hearts, so that the mystery of what they saw was not hidden from them, and the unusual thing that attracted their eyes was not obscure to their minds."² Therefore they made no delay, but paying no heed to the opinions or the objections of others, they set out at once to see Him whom they knew by the star to be born.

At which sign they at once set out in haste.

We might imagine that (as is the custom with such great men) they would have sent their ambassadors on beforehand to find out the new King, and give Him notice of their coming; or that, at least, they would have set everything in order in their own kingdoms, and provided for the government of their subjects during their absence, and that they would have made prep-

¹ *Ecce angelus Domini stetit juxta illos, et claritas Dei circumfuit illos. Natus est vobis hodie Salvator, qui est Christus Dominus, in civitate David.*—Luke ii. 9, 11.

² *Agente hoc sine dubio in eorum cordibus inspiratione divina, ut eos tantæ visionis mysterium non lateret, et quod oculis ostendebatur insolitum animis non esset obscurum.*—S. Leo, *Serm. 3 de Epiph.*

arations for the journey befitting their rank. But no, says St. Thomas: "Neither the weighty affairs of government, nor domestic cares, nor the exigencies of their state, detained them a moment; they do not take long to consult about the journey, nor do they put it off, nor do they spend much time in preparing food and other necessaries; for as soon as they saw the star, they left everything else, and at once set out with all haste."¹ And how quickly they travelled! The holy Fathers are generally of the opinion that these wise men, as soon as they saw the star, began their journey so speedily that, in the space of thirteen days, they met, travelled, arrived in Jerusalem, inquired, and came to Bethlehem. St. Epiphanius, on the other hand, believes that they came to Bethlehem and adored the holy Child when He was in the second year of His age, that is, a year and thirteen days after His birth. St. Augustine maintains that they were two whole years on the road before they reached Jerusalem, and, therefore, that they saw the star in the East, "not a few days beforehand, but for nearly two years, as they said in answer to the question of Herod. 'Therefore, says the Scripture, Herod slew all the children 'from two years old and under, according to the time which he had diligently inquired of the wise men.'"² St. John Chrysostom seems to agree with him when he says that they speedily set out "that they might come to the King whom they were to adore, and from whom they were separated by such a long distance."³ Be that as it may. If the first opinion is the correct one, then the speed of the three kings is so wonderful and extraordinary, that we can hardly grasp it without doing violence to our understandings; and yet there seems to have been no particular reason for such hurry. If the latter opinion is true, then, besides the fact of the diligence they employed in following the call given them, we have still more reason to wonder that those kings resolved to undertake a journey of two years with all its difficulties and discomforts; and that, too, is an evident sign of the divine power which the new-born Child possessed, since He was

¹ Non eos ardua regnorum negotia, non domestica cura, non disponendarum rerum multitudo detinuit, non diu de itinere consulunt, non in longum protrahunt, non expensas et victualia parant; sed viso sidere, omissis omnibus iter arripiunt, viamque cum omni celeritate percurrunt.—S. Thom. Serm. de Epiph.

² Non ante paucos dies, sed ante ferme biennium, sicut inquirenti Herodi patefecerunt. Unde a bimatu et infra, scriptum est; secundum tempus quod exquisierat a Magis.

³ Ut ad Regem adorandum venirent, tam vasto præsertim terrarum spatio separatum.—S. Chrysos. Hom. 6. in Matt.

thus able to bring to His side those kings from such a distant land.

And that,
too, to adore
a Child.

And for what purpose did they undertake that hasty journey? Why did they not shrink from the difficulties that beset it? When Abraham, at the command of God, went into a foreign land, the Almighty promised him all kinds of wealth and honors: "Come into the land which I shall show thee," said the Lord, "and I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and magnify thy name, and thou shalt be blessed." Is it any wonder then that the text says immediately after: "So Abram went out as the Lord had commanded him"?¹ But these kings undertook the journey into the same land of Chanaan, not to receive honors and homage, but to show honor to another; not to obtain riches and wealth, but to present their gifts bareheaded and on bended knee. To whom? To a King who was still a little infant. What a wonderful thing! With good reason again might the courtiers have said to these kings as they were on the point of setting out: What are you about to do? Will you humble your dignity before a Child who is still in swaddling-clothes? before a Child who is not in a state to acknowledge your visit? who cannot even speak, so as to make some answer to your good wishes? And what is that Child to you, after all? You have nothing to fear or to hope from Him. If old prophecies have told you that He is a king, then wait at least till He has attained the royal dignity, and until we hear that He has done something great; then it will be time enough for you to go and offer Him your friendship. Meanwhile we can see what other neighboring nations will do in the matter, and we can manage accordingly. But no; far different was the knowledge that these kings had of the new-born Child: "We have seen His star," that is quite enough for us. At once we must set out without losing a moment, in order to offer Him our humble homage.

Although
they knew
not whether
or where
they should
find Him.

But listen to reason. Where is the Child? Where are you to find Him? We know not; we shall see. Eh! what a strange proceeding for wise men: to travel, and not to know whither! To set out to adore One whose dwelling they know not! Are you then travelling like blind men, and determined to wander about the world, uncertain as to whether you will ever find what you seek? But that makes no matter. If we have to travel the

¹ Veni in terram quam monstrabo tibi. Faciamque te in gentem magnam, et benedicam tibi, et magnificabo nomen tuum, erisque benedictus. Egressus est itaque Abram sicut præceperat ei Dominus.—Gen. xii. 1, 2, 4.

world over, we shall inquire in every place we come to; and, finally, we shall come to some city or country where the people have heard of the birth of this Child. The star we have seen is that of the King of the Jews; therefore we shall go to Jerusalem, as it is the residence of the Jewish monarchs; there we shall find out something reliable. What! To Jerusalem? Where King Herod rules? is actually ruling? And will you ask him where the new King of the Jews is born? Consider well what you are about, for there is no doubt that it is a daring and dangerous thing to ask a reigning sovereign about a new king of the same land, in order to offer homage to him. So it is, my dear brethren. Go, for instance, to London, and ask the king there if the so-called Pretender has yet arrived, and tell him that you have come to bend the knee before the Pretender as your lawful sovereign; what do you think would be your reward? What answer would be made you? You would be at once convicted of treason, and beheaded. But was not the undertaking of the three wise men a similar one? Yet they do not allow themselves to be influenced by fear; they go straight to Jerusalem, boldly appear before Herod, and say to him: "Where is He that is born King of the Jews? We are come to adore Him." And what was the result of their question? The whole city was in confusion. "And King Herod hearing this, was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him;"¹ doubtless through rage and anger at hearing of a new king. Oh, what wonderful constancy on the part of the three kings! "The tyrant rages," says St. Thomas, "the priest is disturbed, the people are in a ferment, and everything threatens immediate death; the star is seen no longer, no one knows anything of the new-born Child; the people, who should have been wishing each other joy at the good news, are in a turmoil; but they bravely persist in their undertaking."² There are evident signs of a divine influence at work here.

Finally, after all these difficulties, they find what they sought for on their long and wearisome journey: "Behold the star which they had seen in the East went before them, until it came and stood over where the Child was. And entering into the house, they found the Child with Mary His Mother." Now, my

They were not deterred by His poverty, but adored Him as their God.

¹ Ubi est qui natus est rex Judæorum? Venimus adorare eum. Audiens autem Herodes rex, turbatus est, et omnis Jerosolyma cum illo.—Matt. ii. 2, 3.

² Fremuit tyrannus, turbatur sacerdos, excandescit vulgus, præsentemque intentant omnia mortem; sidus absconditur, puer natus ignoratur; populus, qui gratulari debuerat de tanto nuntio, perturbatur; et perstant in negotio fortes, constanter cæpta sectantes.

dear brethren, if ever they had cause to regret the journey they had undertaken, and to bewail their disappointment, it was now. For they sought a new-born king; and what did they find? A poor Child in the lap of His Mother, in a stable, or if, as some think, in the city of Bethlehem, in a lowly dwelling. They see no throne, no sceptre, no crown, no body-guard, no attendants. And is this poor Child He before whom they must bow their crowned heads to the earth and bend their knees? Truly their attendants must have murmured to each other: Oh, how ashamed I am of my wise masters; how easily they allowed themselves to be duped by that deceitful star! Is it in a stable that we must seek a king? Nay, they might have reasoned with themselves thus: How can this Child be He of whom it is written: "The Lord is great, and exceedingly to be praised: He is to be feared above all gods"?¹ What sort of a king is that, whom His own refuse to receive, and who, therefore, has to seek shelter in a stable with cattle? How can He be the God of whom the Prophet Isaias says: "A Son is given to us, and the government is upon His shoulder: and His name shall be called, Wonderful, Counsellor, God, the Mighty, the Father of the world to come, the Prince of peace"?² How is He admirable, as He lies there in the midst of poverty? A counsellor, and He a little infant? A mighty hero, and He wrapped in swaddling-clothes? The father of the world to come, who, as soon as He is born, is subject to death? And how can He be the Prince of peace at whose coming all Jerusalem is in a state of perturbation? But the wise men never troubled themselves about such thoughts; as soon as they entered, and saw the Child, "falling down, they adored Him." But, exclaims St. Bernard in astonishment, "What are you doing, O Magi? What are you doing? Do you adore a little infant in a vile hovel, clad in rags? Is He then a God? God is surely in His holy temple; God has His seat in heaven; and you seek Him in a hut, in the lap of His Mother? What do you mean by offering Him gold? Is He then a king? If so, where is the royal palace? the throne? the crowd of courtiers? Do you, perhaps, look on the stable as a palace? the manger as a throne? Joseph and Mary as the courtiers? How have such wise men become so foolish as to adore a puny child,

¹ Magnus Dominus, et laudabilis nimis: terribilis est super omnes deos.—Ps. xlv. 4.

² Filius datus est nobis, et factus est principatus super humerum ejus; et vocabitur nomen ejus, Admirabilis, Consiliarius, Deus, Fortis, Pater futuri sæculi, Princeps pacis.—Is. ix. 6.

despicable as well on account of His age as of the poverty of His friends?"¹ Thus far St. Bernard. In these words he shows forth the wonderful wisdom and strong faith of these kings; since, in spite of all difficulties, they fell prostrate at the feet of the Child. "Falling down they adored Him, and opening their treasures, they offered Him gifts;" and, indeed, gifts which showed that they acknowledged and honored the Child as God, as man, and as king.

My dear brethren, if no prophet had ever said anything of this Child, if we were not assured by faith of His divinity, yet should every sound mind in considering this circumstance alone acknowledge and maintain as an indisputable truth that He must indeed be the almighty God and the Ruler of hearts, and for that very reason this feast is called the Epiphany of the Lord, or the manifestation of His Godhead. For that in our days a king or sovereign, suppose the Roman emperor, or the king of Spain or France, is honored with the most humble signs of submission by all who come into his presence, as he sits on his throne with sceptre and crown, surrounded by a multitude of courtiers and satellites: that is not at all matter for wonder; but that a little infant, so poor and, apparently, so despicable, could by a mere sign induce those kings to come from such a distance in such haste to adore Him in a stable, that is a most wonderful thing, and one which could be effected only by Him who has the hearts of all kings in His hands. Such is the case, as St. Chrysostom says, when he asks: "How should the wise men have sought God, unless at the command of God? How could the astronomer have found the King of heaven, unless by divine revelation? How could the Chaldean without God have adored one only God on earth, since before that he adored as many gods as he found stars in the heavens?"² No, that could not be; the kings would never have adored the Child if the Child had not revealed His divinity. To the same effect are the words of St. Lawrence

Thus this Child showed Himself a mighty God and the Ruler of hearts.

¹ Quid facitis, O Magi? quid facitis? Lactentem puerum adoratis in tugurio villi, in vilibus pannis? Ergone Deus est iste? Deus certe in templo sancto suo; Deus in caelo sedes ejus; et vos queritis in villi stabulo? In Matris gremio? Quid facitis, quod ei aurum offeritis? Ergo rex est iste? Et ubi aula regia? ubi thronus? ubi curiæ regaliæ frequentia? Numquid aula est stabulum? thronus, præseptum? curiæ frequentia, Joseph et Maria? Quomodo ita insipientes facti sunt viri sapientes, ut adorent parvulum despicibilem, tam sua ætate, quam paupertate suorum? S. Bern. Sermon. 1. de Epiph.

² Quando Deum magus, nisi Deo jubente perquireret? Quando Regem caeli, nisi revelante Deo, astrologus invenisset? Quando unum Deum, sine Deo Chaldeus adoraret in terra, qui in caelo diis totidem, quot sideribus serviebat?—S. Chrysost. Sermon. 150.

Justinian: "Grace worked inwardly, the Word spoke, the Godhead declared itself; therefore they knew, they fell prostrate, they worshipped." ¹ King of kings! Lord of hearts! Jesus Christ! we too prostrate ourselves before Thy crib, and with the utmost reverence we adore in Thee, a child, our great God. And we humbly beg of Thee that Thou mayest be the Ruler of our hearts also, and by Thy powerful grace draw them to Thyself and to Thy zealous love! But what am I asking now? Ah, how often dost Thou not call us to Thyself and Thy service by a similar star! But we wilfully harden our hearts, so that they may not be moved to obey Thy call. "That faith of those gentile kings," I must acknowledge with St. Lawrence Justinian, "cries out against us; they seek one who is absent; we despise Him actually present; they wish to adore and acknowledge a man, who is to reign over Israel; but we do not deign to regard or to serve Him who rules over heaven and earth." ² They came at once to adore Him, as soon as they saw His star; we are so often called by the star, and we remain away. My dear brethren, that this is the case with many Christians we shall see to our salutary instruction in the

Second Part.

God calls us,
too, by a
star with
His good
inspira-
tions.

By the star that God still makes use of to call us mortals to Himself, I understand the good inspirations that impel us inwardly either to avoid evil or to do something good and pleasing to God here and there. For instance, to repeat briefly what I have already explained at length on another occasion: a man finds himself in the wretched state of sin, or addicted to some bad habit; suddenly a thought strikes him that makes him quite unhappy and disturbed; go, it says to him, and change this state of things; it is high time; confess your sins; give up that inveterate habit; away from that house in which you have hitherto committed so many vile sins; abandon that person who has hitherto been a stumbling-block to you; restore those ill-gotten goods to their lawful owner; give up those intemperate habits that have done you so much harm, etc. Another has been cold and slothful in the divine service, and has lived a careless life

¹ Intus operabatur gratia, loquebatur Verbum, se manifestabat divinitas; propterea cognoverunt, procciderunt, adoraverunt.

² Clamat prorsus contra nos istorum fides gentilium; absentem quaesierunt, et nos praesentem contemnimus; Hominem regnaturum super Israel agnoscere, atque adorare voluerunt; nos autem presidentem in caelo et in terra, nec aspicere, nec illi famulari dignamur.—S. Laur. Justin. Sermon. de Eoiph.

according to the usages of the vain world; he too is unexpectedly attacked by a similar thought; this life, he thinks, cannot lead to good in the long run, nor conduce to my happiness; this is certainly not the rough, narrow way of penance and the cross, nor can it lead to heaven. I must make a change, prepare for a good general confession, and live in a different manner in future. For Christ's sake I must give up those luxurious habits that are not consistent with Christian modesty and humility. I must rise earlier in the morning; hear Mass every day; go to confession and Communion at least once a week; be regular in attending sermons in order to be encouraged to do good; bring up my children in a different way, etc. One who is unmarried is suddenly struck by the thought: bid good-bye to the dangerous world, and serve your God alone in a convent; a thought that remains in his mind for a long time, even after he has duly reflected on it. I see a poor man, and suddenly I am aware of a feeling of pity and charity that says to me: give the poor man an alms. I am sitting at table and occupied with my meals, eating some article of food that tickles my palate in a special manner, when the thought strikes me: mortify yourself for the love of God; let that food lie, and eat something else instead. I am very thirsty, and am about to take a drink with great desire, when the thought comes: wait a quarter of an hour for God's sake, and suffer thirst for that time. I am lying in bed in the morning, and intend sleeping an hour longer, when the thought comes: get up at once; give this hour to God. I am invited to a pleasant party; eh, I say to myself, remain away; there is a danger for you there. I am in company where uncharitable talk regarding the faults and failings of others is carried on, and I am about to say something to the same effect, when I am suddenly reminded to keep silence. I am in a passion, and am about to revile some one who has injured me, when I say to myself: still; not a word more, or you will sin against Christian charity and meekness. And the same thought occurs to me here and there, when I am on the point of contradicting another, etc. Curiosity drives me to the window to see what is the reason of the noise in the street; while I am going, the thought strikes me: keep away from the window and mortify your curiosity for the love of God. And the same may be said of all occasions in which I am impelled in my thoughts, either to do something good and pleasing to God, or to refrain from something bad and dangerous. These are, generally speak-

ing, all divine inspirations, shining stars, by which the Lord calls us to Himself.

But many refuse to acknowledge this star as the voice of God.

But how do we act when we feel this impulse and movement of the heart? Instead of obeying at once, like the three holy kings, and following the voice of God, we often act like the other people of the East when the new star appeared. There is no doubt that, as it shone clearly in the sky, all grown-up people saw and noticed it; and it must be equally certain that the kings pointed out the star to their subjects as the sign of the newly-born Saviour of the world; and yet we only read of the three kings as having undertaken the journey to offer their homage to the Lord. So that all the others remained at home, and took no notice of the star. Or if, as some of the Fathers say, many of their subjects accompanied the kings, yet the number of the latter must have been small in comparison with those who remained at home. And, nevertheless, the star was a public sign, that invited all to come and adore. But most people said to themselves: What is the star to me? Why should I leave house and home, and undertake such a long journey? I am far from thinking of such a thing; and who knows what the star means? In a word, they did not believe in it as a sure sign of the birth of their Saviour. There, my dear brethren, we have a picture of the manner in which very many Christians receive the divine inspirations; they drive them out of their minds because they do not wish to know or to acknowledge that they are stars of grace that shine from heaven, and come from God, who is calling them. Eh, they say, how do I know where this thought is from? how am I to find out whether it is from God or from some other source? He who is too credulous is easily deceived. We should first examine the matter carefully, and see whether this or that is suitable to my station and position. Otherwise I should have enough to do if I followed all the thoughts and fancies that occur to me. In a word, I am not sure of this being an inspiration from God, etc. Thus all inspirations are rejected without hesitation, in spite of the uneasiness and disquiet of conscience that is the result of doing so. This is a gross deceit of self-love that generally arises from the fear of difficulty or mortification in following the good inspiration; or from human respect, that we must overcome in order to do this or to abstain from that; or from sensuality and love of comfort, which the good inspiration tends to interfere with. This self-love and fear of difficul-

ty is so great with some men, that they do not venture to make known their doubt to their confessor, or to some one who is capable of advising them; for they fear that if they thus get a clearer knowledge of the divine will, they may be compelled to act as the inspiration urges them, and to do something opposed to their natural inclinations.

But is it not acting very discourteously with the good God thus to reject His inspirations and proffered graces? I say His inspirations and graces; for those movements of the heart that urge to good and deter from evil, generally speaking, can come only from God who calls us, as I have proved more at length on a former occasion. And has not the Almighty good reason to be indignant at this? Who ever heard of a prince or king or lord offering his servants and subjects a favor or benefit, and the latter refusing it because they doubt whether it is really a gift from their master? Oh, the earthly master has only to make a sign, when the whole household is on foot, ready to obey him; and that, too, in the hope of winning his favor. But the great Monarch of heaven, who is immutable in His will, inscrutable in His decrees, infinitely wise and provident in His dispositions, who is not at all in need of the services of His creatures: He may sign and call and invite and beg and pray of His creatures by His inspirations, and that, too, for the good of their souls; but they turn a deaf ear to Him. A poor mortal can venture to shrug his shoulders and make answer: what you say to me does not please me; make what signs you wish, call as loudly as you please, I do not want to know, O Lord, whether this grace comes from you or not, whether I can do something to win your favor or not. No earthly lord would be treated so contemptuously; it is only the great God who is thus insulted by men. What a gross injustice!

They treat God with discourtesy.

There are others who are wont to show somewhat more courtesy towards the divine inspirations, although they do not obey them at once. They are like the people of the East, who, as we have every reason to suppose, learned from the kings the meaning of the star, and looked on it as the sign of the new-born Saviour, and would doubtless willingly have paid their homage to the Lord, but they put off doing so; let us wait, they said to themselves, for a more convenient opportunity; our kings will return and tell us where they found the Child, and we shall still have time enough to visit and adore Him. Such, I say, is the man-

Others wish to follow, but defer doing so.

ner in which many Christians act when they are urged by good inspirations to conversion and a change of life. They cannot deny that those inspirations come from God and a heavenly Spirit for the good of their souls; they are equally aware of their duty and obligation to hearken willingly to the voice of God, and to obey it; they dare not reject and condemn those proffered graces, or say by their acts: Away, O Lord! I will not do as Thou wishest; they cannot make up their minds to such a mode of action, as they dread the sting of remorse. How then do they act? That they may appear not to reject the Almighty altogether, and, at the same time, throw a sop to still the gnawing of conscience, they say: Yes, I will obey, I will hearken, I will do as required; but it is not convenient at once; another time will be more suitable. I will repent of and confess the mortal sins I have committed, and amend my life on the next great feast-day. I will avoid and renounce the proximate occasion of sin and that unlawful intimacy when my year of service is at an end; or when the person with whom I am entangled is gone away from here. I will restore that ill-gotten property to its lawful owner when my domestic affairs are in better condition. I will be reconciled to my neighbor if he first shows me some signs of friendship. I will remove that occasion of scandal when I see how others in my position act with regard to it. I will lead a better and more zealous life, be more diligent in the practice of virtue, go more frequently to confession and Communion, rise earlier in the morning, make a better use of the precious time conceded me, renounce vanity and sensuality, be more diligent in attending sermons, etc., but not at once; these changes cannot be effected in a moment; in time they will all come right. See how most people try to soothe their uneasy consciences, and, at the same time, to have the appearance of hearkening to the voice of God.

And their mode of action is dangerous, too, because they treat God unjustly.

And this is that most dangerous road by which the devil drags down with him to the fire of hell almost all the souls of men that are rejected by God; namely, deferring to a future time the profiting by the graces that God offers. For, in the first place, is not that a most iniquitous way of acting with the beneficent God when He calls men to Himself and, with well-meaning heart, offers them His grace and favor? Is it not making sport of the Divine Majesty, as it were, and turning it into ridicule, to put it off with empty words, and turn it away like a beggar from the door, bidding it wait for an uncertain hereafter; saying, as if to a

beggar: I would willingly give you a bit of bread, but it does not suit me to do so now; come some other time, and you will perhaps get what you want? Miserable mortal, what are you thinking of? Does not the great God deserve to be heard at once? Do you not owe to Him all you have and are? Does He not merit to be served and loved by you in the highest possible degree now, as well as at some uncertain future time? There is no doubt of it, as you yourself must acknowledge. But now that you deliberately resolve, after having heard and recognized the divine inspiration, to serve your God in the future, or to serve Him in more zealous fashion as He desires, you resolve, at the same time, not to serve Him now, to continue to be careless in His service. Is that a right and just way in which to act towards your God, who is worthy of all love and reverence? Is it not rather stealing from Him the service and love you owe Him, and which He is now actually requiring of you?

Again, you say: hereafter I will be converted; hereafter I will lead a more zealous life. Tell me this: do you know that the star of grace will shine on you hereafter? If the three kings had not obeyed at once, as soon as they recognized the star; if they had put off their journey to the following year, the star would certainly have disappeared, nor would they ever have found the Saviour, and thus they would have persisted to the end in their blind heathenism. How do you know, I ask again, O sinful or tepid Christian, whether an inspiration or impulse similar to that which you now experience will ever again be offered you? Will not the Lord God, who has already so often called to you in vain, perhaps grow tired of calling? According to the beautiful words of St. Augustine, the Almighty still distributes His gifts and graces in the world, as Jesus Christ dispensed His favors in His wanderings through Judea. And how is that? "*Pertransiit benefaciendo*"—"Who went about doing good."¹ Ah, that is the terrible word—"pertransiit." St. Augustine, frightened at it, as it were, exclaims: "Brethren, this I say, and say openly: I fear Jesus when He passes by."² For he who passes by seldom comes back again to the same place, or at all events does not return quickly. You too, tepid Christian, have reason to fear. Now that you are aware of the good inspiration, the inward impulse, Jesus is at your house and wishes to do you good; ah, I beg of you, accept the prof-

And the star of grace may never shine on them again.

¹ Acts x. 38.

² Fratres hoc dico: timeo Jesum transeuntem.—S. Aug. Serm. 18. de verb. Dom.

ferred grace at once; for He will, in all likelihood, not come back for a long time with the light and grace He now offers you; nay, perhaps as long as you live He will not return again with similar graces.

Conclusion and resolution, after the example of the three kings, to obey the divine inspirations at once.

Therefore, "to-day if you shall hear His voice, harden not your hearts."¹ Whenever you are aware of a good inspiration, think and say with the three holy kings: "This is the sign of a great King; come let us adore Him." This is the star of grace which now shines for my salvation; I must, then, and will follow it without delay; this is perhaps the last voice I shall hear from Heaven for my conversion and amendment; truly I am not sure of that; yet it may be the last voice, the last light, the last invitation and warning. Therefore I will delay no longer, nor put off the fulfilment of that to which I am invited and warned. Now at once I will obey that voice; now at once I will sincerely repent of and confess my sins; now at once I will shun the proximate occasion, give up that unlawful intimacy, the society of that person; now at once I will make restitution of that ill-gotten property, and give it back to its owner; now at once I will lay aside that secret hatred and anger I have hitherto nourished against my neighbor, and be reconciled to him from my heart; now I will renounce all vanity; now I will begin to lead a better, more virtuous, humble, and perfect life, and persevere therein to the end. Yes, O God, so it shall be with Thy grace. Amen.

¹ Hodie si vocem ejus audieritis, nolite obdurare corda vestra.—Ps. xciv. 8.

ON THE CONSIDERATION OF THE SUFFERINGS OF CHRIST.

SIXTH SERMON.

WHAT GOOD REASON WE HAVE OFTEN TO THINK OF THE SUFFERINGS OF CHRIST.

Subject.

It is most reasonable that we should often remember the sufferings of Christ: first, because Christ expects us to do so; second, because what Christ has suffered He has suffered on our account.—*Preached on Ash-Wednesday.*

Text.

Recogitate eum qui talem sustinuit a peccatoribus adversus semetipsum contradictionem. —Heb. xii. 3.

“Think diligently upon Him that endured such opposition from sinners against Himself.”

Introduction.

If I were to-day to examine the contradictions that God has had to suffer from sinners in the days of last Shrove-tide, I should never come to an end, and I should have to say things that would offend decency. For what else is the mode of life observed during those days but a relic inherited by Christianity from idolatrous heathenism, whereby all license is allowed by most people to lust, dissolute conduct, gluttony, wantonness, and sin of all kinds; as if, during this time, sin were not so grievous and unjust towards God, nor so strictly forbidden by Him as at other seasons of the year; as if there were then no occasion to dread such a strict judgment, such a terrible hell; as if unrestrained freedom between the sexes, indecency in dress and the frequenting of the proximate occasions of sin were less dangerous than at other times; as if parents were less bound to look after their children; as if one were allowed to do that which he must afterwards bitterly deplore; as if the extravagance in spending money

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that might have stilled the hunger of many a poor man were then less to be answered for before the judgment-seat of God (ah, there is many a town, especially in these troublous times, that can ill bear such extravagance!); as if constant dissipation, turning night into day (and that too on Sundays and holy-days, which should be consecrated to God, but on which, in that season, hardly a Mass is heard, while they who do hear Mass go to bed immediately after, that they may be ready to resume dancing again in the evening)—as if, I say, that were the proper way to keep the day holy! I cannot bear to think of the enormity any longer; I know that they who are here present have had no share in it. But these days are now past; would to God that sin too came to an end with them forever, for the ashes sprinkled on our foreheads to-day are not enough to atone for everything. The season of Lent that is just commencing directs my thoughts to other contradictions that our God had to suffer in His mortal body from the Jews, namely, to the bitter sufferings and death of Jesus Christ, the Saviour of the world. In the words of my text St. Paul exhorts us all frequently to think of this: "Think diligently upon Him that endured such opposition from sinners against Himself;" upon Him who endured for us bitter torments, even to a shameful death. And during this Lent I shall endeavor to urge you often to think of this. Often recall to mind the passion and death of Christ; for there is nothing more reasonable than that frequent recollection; nothing more consoling; nothing more useful; such shall be the matter of three meditations. The first I divide into two points, thus:

Plan of Discourse.

It is most reasonable for us often to think of this, because Christ, who suffered, demands and expects it from us: the first point. It is reasonable, because Christ endured His sufferings for us: the second point.

Christ Jesus, by whose passion and death we are redeemed, draw our hearts and minds so to Thee, that through love and gratitude to Thee we may with Thy apostle desire to know and think of nothing else but Thee, the Crucified One. O Mary, Mother of sorrows, and you holy angels who wept at the death of your Creator, obtain this grace for us!

**A conquer-
or wishes** It is pleasing to a great hero, who has gained a remarkable victory over his enemies, to have his bravery and success made

known, talked of, and admired throughout the world; for reputation and glory before men consists in this, that others look on our actions as praiseworthy; if our exploits are unknown and unadmired, there is an end of our glory. Again, a suffering man finds no mean consolation in the fact that others know of and sympathize with his trials and crosses, and give him outward proof of their friendly fellow-feeling. That we see to be the case with all the sick and oppressed, and all who have anything to suffer; for they at once make known their sorrow to their dear friends, tell them in detail all about their woes, and thus it seems to them as if their pain was already somewhat alleviated, and as if they had shared the half of it with a sympathizing heart. A secret, unknown sorrow, that must be borne without sympathy, is, beyond a doubt, the most bitter of all, on account of that want of sympathy.

My dear brethren, who is the suffering and dying Saviour? If we consider the fruits of His passion and death, we look on Him as an illustrious warrior, who, by His cross and death, has conquered sin, the devil, and death itself. So He Himself said, when filled with courage He went with His disciples to Jerusalem to be taken, given over to His enemies, and done to death: "Now shall the prince of this world be cast out,"¹ and as the Apostle says, He came forward, and ascended the cross, "that through death He might destroy him who had the empire of death, that is to say, the devil: and might deliver them who, through the fear of death, were all their lifetime subject to servitude."² If, on the other hand, we consider His passion in itself, we look on Him as He is described by the Prophet: "A man of sorrows, and acquainted with infirmity;"³ who from crown of head to sole of foot had not a sound place in His body, nor one free from pain; whom we hear saying: "But I am a worm, and no man: the reproach of men, and the outcast of the people. All they that saw Me have laughed Me to scorn; they have spoken with the lips, and wagged the head;"⁴ in the whole world I can find no one to pity Me, or to say a word of comfort to Me.

to have his victories spoken of, a sufferer to have his trials spoken of with sympathy.

Christ in His passion was a conqueror, and also a great sufferer.

¹ Nunc princeps hujus mundi ejicietur foras.—John xii. 31.

² Ut per mortem destrueret eum qui habebat mortis imperium, id est diabolum; et liberaret eos qui timore mortis per totam vitam obnoxii erant servituti.—Heb. ii. 14, 15.

³ Virum dolorum, et scientem infirmitatem.—Is. liii. 3.

⁴ Ego autem sum vermis, et non homo; opprobrius hominum, et abjectio plebis. Omnes videntes me deriserunt me; locuti sunt labiis, et moverunt caput.—Ps. xxi. 7, 8.

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Therefore
He desires
us often to
think of
His suffer-
ings.

How then can we please Him better than by often thinking of and congratulating Him on His glorious triumph? What greater consolation can we offer Him than often to deplore with loving, sorrowing, and pitiful hearts the great torments and painful death He endured? Hear how earnestly He Himself desires and asks for this diligent recollection and compassionate remembrance: "O all ye that pass by the way, attend and see if there be any sorrow like to My sorrow."¹ And that wonderful and incomprehensible invention of His love, that He has left us in the Blessed Sacrament of the Altar which He instituted before His death, had as its end and aim to keep the memory of His passion and death fresh in our minds. "This," said He to His disciples, "is My body which shall be delivered for you;" and, He adds immediately after, "this do for the commemoration of Me." And what was it to remind them of? "For as often as you shall eat this bread and drink the chalice, you shall show the death of the Lord until He come"—that is, as the Syrian language has it, "you shall bring to mind My bitter passion and death."² What else is the meaning of the crosses erected here and there throughout Catholic countries? Of the pictures representing the passion of Christ that are to be found in all Catholic churches? Does it not mean that the Church, penetrated with the spirit of Christ, and knowing best what is pleasing to Him, wishes thereby to impress on our hearts the constant recollection of the bitter passion and death of our dear Saviour? "Think then diligently upon Him." Often recall to mind Him who has suffered so much. This He Himself requires and expects of us; for this He asks us by His prophets and apostles. Is it not right for us to fulfil this desire of our sovereign God? Shall we refuse Him this consolation, which costs us no more than a compassionate, loving thought? Ah, far more, O suffering and dying God, hast Thou deserved from us!

But very
few think
of them.

And yet how few there are in the world who gratify this wish of Thine! How few there are, even among Thy own Christians, who give Thee the consolation they owe Thee! Reason hast Thou to utter again the complaint Thou didst make by Thy proph-

¹ O vos omnes qui transitis per viam, attendite, et videte si est dolor sicut dolor meus.—Lam. i. 12.

² Hoc est corpus meum, quod pro vobis tradetur: hoc facite in meam commemorationem. Quotiescumque enim manducabitis panem hunc, et calicem bibetis, mortem Domini annuntiabitis donec veniat.—I. Cor. xi. 24, 26.

Reason for Thinking Often of Christ's Sufferings. 77

et Isaias: "The just perisheth, and no man layeth it to heart."¹ Jesus our Saviour suffers and dies, and hardly is one or the other to be found to take it to heart. Most of us are like what the Evangelist St. Luke tells us of the disciples of Christ: "Then Jesus took unto Him the twelve, and said to them: Behold we go up to Jerusalem, and all things shall be accomplished which were written by the prophets concerning the Son of man; for He shall be delivered to the Gentiles, and shall be mocked and scourged, and spit upon; and after they have scourged Him, they will put Him to death. And," continues the Evangelist, "they understood none of those things, and this word was hidden from them, and they understood not the things that were said."² Speak nowadays to the vain children of the world of the sufferings of Christ; they will not understand you; they have no taste for such things; the only result you gain is to excite horror and fear in them; and, therefore, they carefully shut out all such thoughts from their minds. The proud man continues to think of his honors and vain pomp; the avaricious man of his money and property; the unchaste man of his lusts and the objects of his affections; the envious man of those whose good fortune is a thorn in his side; the idle man thinks of the comforts and pleasures of life, of dancing and singing; the merchant of his trade and traffic; the litigious man of the lawsuit in which he is engaged,—every one thinks of his own affairs: "The just perisheth, and no man layeth it to heart." Thou, O Jesus, art suffering and dying, and there is hardly one who reflects seriously and with due feelings of compassion on Thy passion and death. Many act the part of those who were on Mount Calvary, where the high-priests and soldiers mocked Thee and blasphemed Thee, while others of the rabble passed by wagging their heads. They show that clearly enough by their tepidity, wilful distractions, irreverence, curiosity, disrespectful conduct, talking and laughing even at the moment when, in the holy sacrifice of the Mass, the memory of Thy bitter passion and death is renewed on the altar. If there are some of the pious who think of Thee, even they act like the disciples, who when Thou didst show Thyself to them in Thy

¹ Justus perit, et non est qui recogitet in corde suo.—Is. lvii. 1.

² Assumpsit autem Jesus duodecim, et ait illis: Ecce ascendimus Jerusalem, et consummabuntur omnia quæ scripta sunt per prophetas de Filio hominis. Tradeturenim gentibus, et illudetur, et flagellabitur, et conspuetur; et postquam flagellaverint, occident eum. Et ipsi nihil horum intellexerunt, et erat verbum istud absconditum ab eis, et non intelligebant quæ dicebantur.—Lu^{ce} xvii. 31-34.

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glory on Mount Thabor wished to build tabernacles in order to share in Thy splendor, but when Thou wert taken prisoner abandoned Thee. They consider Thee as a little infant in the arms of Thy Mother, and thus find much comfort and spiritual delight; but they cannot bear to represent Thee to their minds with the same Mother standing under the cross on which Thou art hanging in pain and disgrace. They think of Thy passion only superficially, and, as it were, merely allow it to pass through their minds without being moved to any deep feelings of compassion, without pain, without love, without experiencing any impulse to imitate Thee, without deriving any profit from the consideration: "The just perisheth, and no man layeth it to heart."

Exhortation
to meditate
on the pas-
sion at least
during
Lent.

"Oh, if thou only knewest the mystery of the cross!"¹ exclaimed St. Andrew to the tyrant; and the same I now say to you, Christian soul. If you only knew and understood the wisdom, the royal treasure hidden in the mystery of the cross and in the contemplation of the death of Christ, your thoughts would always be directed thither, and with St. Paul you would desire to know nothing in the whole world but Jesus the Crucified. At least during this Lent let that consideration sink deeply into your heart; show your devotion by frequently visiting the church and listening attentively to the sermons on the passion that will be preached during the public devotions. And I am speaking now of a serious meditation, not of a mere effort of the imagination; so that the thought of the sufferings of Christ may keep you away from all sin and worldly vanity, and fill you with a zealous love for your Redeemer. And if the wish and desire of Our Lord Himself is not enough to urge you to this, then should you be induced frequently to think of His passion, at least by the feelings of gratitude, and by a sense of common decency, because it was for your sake He suffered so much; and this brings me to the

Second Part.

All that
Christ suf-
fered was
through
love for us.

Suppose a stranger quite unknown to us, and of no interest to us, had to suffer against his will, without any thought whatever of us, but merely for his crimes, so that his punishment is well deserved, then we should have some excuse for regarding his torments with indifference; although, even in such circumstances, Christian charity would require us to feel some pity for him.

¹ O si scires mysterium crucis!

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But, I must ask again, as I did before: who is He whose sufferings and death are proposed to us during this season as a subject for our consideration? Is He perhaps nothing to us? But He is Jesus our King, our Lord, our Father, our God. What crime has He committed to be so tortured? But He is innocence and holiness itself; and His only fault is that He loved in an unheard-of manner. And must He be tortured for that? Who forces Him to it? But who can do violence to the Almighty God? "He was offered because it was His own will."¹ He Himself, without any compulsion, accepted the torture. And for what purpose? For whose sake? "For us men;" it is for us, for our sake, that He undertook, as our hostage, to pay the strict justice of God. We were children of wrath, as the Apostle says, and objects of the divine anger; before being born into the world, we were excluded from the joys of heaven. No man, nor angel, nor any creature was able to free us from that misfortune, and to offer a sufficient atonement to the divine justice for our sins; and therefore He, the eternal Son of God, moved by sheer pity, took the whole debt off us and on Himself, subjected Himself to the miseries of our condition that it might be well with us, chose a wretched lot, and gave up His own life to pain, to wounds, to the gibbet of the cross, to a bitter death, that we might preserve our lives.

Now, my dear brethren, think of this for a moment. If Jesus Christ has given His life for us, is it not just that we should give Him ours in return? And if the latter were of infinite value, we must still confess that we owe it to Him; for by His death He has acquired an infinite right to ourselves and all belonging to us. "You are not your own," says the Apostle, "for you are bought with a great price;"² you can no longer dispose of yourselves without injustice, for you belong to Him who has purchased you. Our heart, our understanding, our memory, our will, our body, our soul, our honor, our property, our blood, our health, our life—all belong to Him, and must be expended in His service: not otherwise than as a slave is the property of his master, and must serve and toil and work for him alone. Now Our Lord does not require us to take our lives, or to rob ourselves of our goods and honor, or to extenuate our bodies by severe and constant penances; all He wants is our appreciation, gratitude,

It is but right, then, that we should often remember this love.

¹ Oblatus est quia ipse voluit.—Is. llii. 7.

² Non estis vestri, empti enim estis pretio magno.—I. Cor. vi. 19, 20.

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love, and affection. We should think of what He has done for us, and remember the pains He endured for our sake. What less could Jesus ask of those for whom He died on the cross, than that they should think of His torments and death with heartfelt sentiments of compassion?

And it would be odious ingratitude for us to forget it.

And, therefore, what grosser ingratitude could there be than to refuse Him even that little? A heathen, a Turk, would be ashamed of being so ungrateful as to forget a benefit conferred on him by a man like himself; and shall a Christian forget his sovereign God, who, for his sake, suffered all imaginable torments, and to save him from eternal death sacrificed His own life, and endured the most bitter and painful martyrdom of the cross? The holy prophet David can hardly restrain his indignation at the Jews, who, after having been so wonderfully freed by the Lord from the slavery of the Egyptians, yet so quickly forgot that benefit. "They changed their glory," he says, "into the likeness of a calf that eateth grass."¹ How so? "They forgot God, who saved them, who had done great things in Egypt."² O Christian, compare Egypt and hell, Pharaoh and the devil, the slavery of the Jews and that of the damned, the labors of the former and the torments of the latter, time and a long eternity, and see how indignant the holy angels must be with those Christians who, by a monstrous ingratitude, forget their God who, by His own most precious blood, saved them from the slavery of the devil, freed them from the power of the hellish Pharaoh, and brought them to the land of salvation! O thankless people, they must exclaim, who show themselves to be no better than the senseless animal that eats hay and straw! "They forgot God, who saved them;" they forget their King, their Father, their Saviour, their Redeemer, who gave Himself altogether for them, who called them from death to life, who has done nothing but good to them.

Yet most men do so, and Christ complains of them.

And is not this the case frequently with us? "I am forgotten as one dead from the heart,"³ is the just complaint made by the Lord; that is, I am forgotten as one who is dead, as one who is not remembered for longer than a few months after his decease. I am dead in the imaginations of men, dead in their memories, dead in their minds and understandings. Hardly is there one left who thinks of Me. O heavenly Father, how fruitless is the labor I undertook for men! I had hoped that they would

¹ Mutaverunt gloriam suam in similitudinem vituli comedentis fœnum.—Ps. cv. 20.

² Obliti sunt Deum qui salvavit eos, qui fecit magna in Ægypto.—Ibid. 21.

³ Oblivioni datus sum, tanquam mortuus a corda.—Ibid. xxx. 13.

love Me just as I loved them; at least I imagined that they would always think with grateful hearts of the benefits they owe Me. Therefore, on the eve of My death I begged of them often to remember the love I bore them; this was the only consolation, the only recognition, the only reward I expected from them; but even that much I cannot obtain. "I am forgotten as one dead from the heart;" they think as little of Me as if they had never received anything from Me, as if I were simply nothing whatever to them. Nay, what makes their conduct much worse, they actually drive Me by violence out of their hearts by the thoughts, imaginations, and desires that they cast on sinful and unlawful objects. This is their gratitude for the great love I have shown them.

Christian soul! see whether Jesus our Saviour can make a similar complaint of you. If you have hitherto been backward in showing due gratitude to your sovereign Benefactor, now, at all events, do not any longer forget the benefits He has bestowed on you; impress deeply on your heart the exhortation of the wise Ecclesiasticus: "Forget not the kindness of thy surety: for He hath given His life for thee."¹ When Tigranes with his wife was taken captive by King Cyrus, and was asked by the latter what he would give for his wife's freedom; "for that I would willingly give my life," was his answer. The king, moved by his magnanimity, generously gave to both their freedom. A short time afterward Tigranes asked her what she thought of the king, of his bravery and beauty. Ah, she replied, I do not know; I was not looking at the king at all, but only at him who offered his life for me. An answer, my dear brethren, which might put many a Christian to shame; an answer that we have all good reason to keep steadily before our minds, so as in every circumstance to show due thankfulness to our suffering Redeemer. Tigranes only said that he was willing to give his life for his wife's freedom, but he remained alive for all that. Jesus Christ has not only made the same offer for us with the lips, but He has actually given His life voluntarily in an unheard-of manner for us poor mortals, who are not in any way necessary to Him; and can we then cast the eyes of our minds on anything else but on this Saviour, by whose death we are freed from the slavery of hell, and placed in the freedom of the children of God? Can we allow ourselves to be blinded by the consideration of another's forbidden beauty? Can

Exhortation to think of the passion of Christ with lively gratitude. Explained by an example after the manner of a simile.

¹ Gratiam fidejussoris ne obliviscaris: dedit enim pro te animam suam.—Eccles. xxix. 20.

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we set our minds and hearts on earthly transitory things to such an extent as not to leave any room in our thoughts for our Benefactor? No; far be that from us. In future whenever a creature, a good, a pleasure or joy, tempts us to inordinate desire or unlawful imagination or love, let us at once turn away our minds and say and think: I do not care for such things; my desires and thoughts I centre only on Him who has given His life for me; to Him alone belongs my heart, my love, my affection—all that I have.

Sorrow for
past forget-
fulness of
Christ, and
purpose to
think often
of His
passion and
death.

O dearest Saviour, such is the way in which I should always have acted. But alas, how ashamed I am when I think of how grossly I have forgotten Thy passion and death in the years during which I have lived! How ashamed I must feel when I consider the little love I have borne Thee, the grievous ingratitude with which I have returned Thee evil for good, the insensibility of heart with which I have thought now and then of what Thou hast undergone for me! If I happened to read in some work of fiction of a great lord being reduced to misery and misfortune, my heart became soft through pity, nay, my eyes overflowed with tears; and behold, an infallible faith assures me that Thou, the God of infinite majesty, beauty, and love, my own most loving Father, wert drowned, so to speak, in a sea of torments, and put to a most disgraceful death, and that, too, for my sake; and yet no feeling of pity has forced a tear from my eye, a sigh from my heart; hardly once in the week have I thought of what Thou hast done; I have forgotten Thee altogether! Did I not deserve to be thrust forth out of Thy divine heart, because I have banished Thee from mine? Would it not have served me right if Thou hadst forgotten me, since I thought so seldom of Thee? It is true, O Lord, I have deserved that! But Thou art infinitely better than I; and, therefore, I hope that Thou wilt not deal with me according to my deserts. Henceforward I will turn my thoughts to Thee more frequently; I will impress deeply on my heart Thy painful passion and death. Not a day of my life, especially during this holy season of Lent, shall pass by without my remembering Thee once at least, and thus encouraging myself to love Thee constantly with patience in adversity and zeal in Thy service. Amen.

SEVENTH SERMON.

ON THE CONSOLATION TO BE DERIVED FROM THE CONSIDERATION OF THE SUFFERINGS OF CHRIST.

Subject.

The frequent consideration of the sufferings of Christ is very consoling: 1, for the just; 2, for sinners.—*Preached on the Wednesday of the first week in Lent.*

Text.

Recogitate eum qui talem sustinuit a peccatoribus adversum semetipsum contradictionem; ut ne fatigemini, animis vestris deficientes.—Heb. xii. 3.

“Think diligently upon Him that endured such opposition from sinners against Himself: that you be not wearied, fainting in your minds.”

Introduction.

We do not willingly think of a sorrowful topic, because it is apt to make us sad and melancholy. And it is this that keeps many from meditating on the passion of Christ; for the matter seems too sad to them. But with the Apostle I now say quite the contrary: “Think diligently,” often recall to mind what contradiction, pain, and torment, and what a disgraceful death your Saviour suffered from sinners; and think of it “that you be not wearied, fainting in your minds;” that in the many trials of life you may not lose courage or energy, or give way to weariness. For there is no thought more sweet, consoling, or agreeable for all kinds of men, than the frequent consideration of the passion of Christ, as I now proceed to show.

Plan of Discourse.

There is none more consoling for the just; the first point. None more consoling for sinners; the second point.

I begin at once, relying on my usual helpers, the Blessed Virgin and our holy guardian angels.

It is a sweet and pleasant thing to be esteemed and loved, especially when he who loves us is of exceptional dignity, amia-

It is comforting to be

loved and to
have a com-
panion in
suffering.

bility, and excellence. How does not the world esteem a favorable look, a friendly demeanor, a kindly word from a prince, king, or emperor! To enjoy such favor, grace, and friendship from an exalted personage seems to many the height of bliss, nay, a joyful heaven in itself. Again, it is a sweet and comforting thing, when one is in trouble, to have a companion, and that all the more when the latter has much more to suffer than we, although he deserves to suffer much less, and is, at the same time, powerful enough to be able and compassionate enough to be willing to encourage, comfort, and help his companion in misfortune. Where is the soldier who does not feel the loss of his finger much less when he sees that his general's whole arm has been shot off? Where the child who complains of having nothing but dry bread to eat when he sees that his father and mother have not even bread enough?

The just
enjoy both
consola-
tions when
they con-
sider the
passion of
Christ.

There, my dear brethren, is a twofold source of comfort and consolation for two classes of the just; and they arise infallibly from the earnest consideration of the sufferings and death of Christ. For, as far as this world is concerned, things go either well or ill with you. However it be, in the thought that Christ has suffered for you and given up His life on the cross for you, you have at least this comfort, that you are highly esteemed and most ardently loved by your God. If things go ill with you, then the same thought brings you moreover this consolation, that you have your God as a companion in suffering; that you have a lover than whom none can be greater, more excellent, or more tender; an associate in sorrow than whom none can be truer, mightier, more compassionate. So that in both cases you enjoy a consolation than which none greater, better, more agreeable can be desired.

It seems
incredible
that God
should love
man.

Let us consider briefly the first case. "Man knoweth not," says the Wise Man, "whether he be worthy of love or hatred."¹ For the whole of a long eternity God has never been idle in His thoughts; but, asks St. Bernard, who can tell us what He thought and of whom? No one has been His counsellor, no one has ever seen into His mind; who then could ever imagine that amongst those divine thoughts there were some that were directed to men? Who could believe that God had any love for men? If, on the one hand, we consider His infinite, in itself most perfect and most happy Being, that stands in need of no other, and on

¹ Nescit homo utrum amore an odio dignus sit.—Ecclesi. ix. 1.

the other hand our lowly, poor, and miserable nature, then we must acknowledge that we do not deserve or merit in any way to be loved by such an infinitely great Lord. And if, moreover, we consider our moral nature, that is, the sin in which we are born, then we must confess not only that we are unworthy of love, but that we merit rather the divine hatred. Hence, as it seems incredible that a mighty king should become enamored of a blind, lame, and deformed servant-maid, so too, nay, much more incredible must it appear that a mortal so lowly, abject, and deformed by sin should win the heart and the love of the God of infinite beauty.

True it is that God signified to men in the Old Testament by fewer and less significative signs, that He loved them with a fatherly affection; for He always spoke to them in lightnings and thunders, inspiring them with fear and terror. But now that the world has experienced that the same God gave His only-begotten Son, and delivered Him to a cruel death for our salvation, we must confess and cry out with wonderment: "God so loved the world as to give His only-begotten Son,"¹ and sacrifice Him entirely for our welfare. Can there be any greater sign of love, asks our dear Lord Himself, than for a man to give his life for his friend? If He had not loved us, why did He not leave us in our misery, a prey to damnation? If He had not loved us, what necessity was He under of enduring such torments for our sake? To what purpose served His tears, His toil and labor, the shedding of His blood? Why did He stretch out His arms on the cross to receive us? Why did He suffer such a shameful death? No; it is and cannot be otherwise than as the Apostle says: "God commendeth His charity towards us: because, when as yet we were sinners, according to the time, Christ died for us."² As often then as I remember His passion and death, so often am I convinced and assured of the great love of God for me.

Oh, what joy and consolation this thought brings to my soul! What greater happiness can I seek or desire in this world? I am better off than if I had the mightiest potentate as my friend. God loves me; what evil then have I to fear in the world? He who loves me can and will take my part, and care for, protect, and defend me. God loves me; why then should I be anxious as

But we are sure of it when we remember that God suffered for us.

A wonderful comfort for the just.

¹ Sic Deus dilexit mundum, ut Filium suum unigenitum daret.—John iii. 16.

² Commendat charitatem suam Deus in nobis, quoniam cum adhuc peccatores essemus, secundum tempus Christus pro nobis mortuus est.—Rom. v. 8, 9.

to the esteem or love of men? God loves me; why then should I complain that others hate and despise me? This Lover, this Friend, is better than all, and He alone should suffice for me. God loves me, and if I am in the state of grace, I love my God; why then should I be so pusillanimous and faint-hearted in things that concern my eternal salvation? Why should I not with a childlike confidence, and filled with courage and joy, expect heaven and eternal happiness? For, St. Paul goes on to say, if Christ died for us when we were still sinners, "much more therefore, being now justified by His blood, shall we be saved from wrath through Him. For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son, much more being reconciled, shall we be saved by His life."¹ God loves me, and this love no man or devil can take from me against my will; therefore I will resign myself, my body, my soul, my property, my health, and life, and all that I have, to His providence, goodwill, and care, as completely as a child abandons itself to the hands of a loving father. Let him do with and dispose of me as He pleases; I am sure that no evil can come to me from such a powerful, faithful, good, and loving Friend. God loves me even to death, and therefore I will seek no other pleasure except that of loving Him above all things my whole life long, even to the hour of my death. O just souls, see what consolation is to be derived from the thought of the sufferings of Christ!

The afflicted too, are comforted by the thought that they have God as a companion in suffering. Shown by a simile.

And if you are in the number of those who have to suffer trials and crosses here below, and are therefore more in need of comfort, then "think diligently" of Jesus, who loves you, and was crucified for your sake, that, as the Apostle immediately adds, "you be not wearied, fainting in your minds." Only examine carefully what He suffered, and then see what your own sufferings are, and you will not find a single pain or grief, nay, you will not be able to imagine one in which you have not Jesus Christ your God as your companion. Truly if that consideration brings you no comfort or alleviation, I know not what can help you! Plutarch tells us of a wise and excellent man named Phocion, who lived at Athens, and who, although innocent, was condemned by the Athenians to death. Amongst the companions of his misfortune there was one who bitterly bewailed his fate. Phocion, to comfort him, said: Why are you weeping? What are

¹ Multo igitur magis nunc justificati in sanguine ipsius, salvi erimus ab ira per ipsum. Si enim cum inimici essemus, reconciliati sumus Deo per mortem Filii ejus, multo magis reconciliati, salvi erimus in vita ipsius.—Rom. v. 9, 10.

you complaining of? Is it because you have to die? Eh! look at me! I am not a whit better off than you. Is it no comfort to you to die in Phocion's company? O Christian soul! if your afflictions and trials sometimes seem too hard to bear, and threaten to overwhelm you, filling your mind with inordinate, impatient, and complaining thoughts, with discontent and bitterness, and almost with despair, "think diligently" then on your Companion, on your suffering and dying Saviour, and say to yourself: Is it no comfort to you to suffer with Christ? He endured torments even to the shedding of every drop of His blood, even to the disgraceful death of the cross; surely you have not yet had that much to suffer! He was innocence itself, and had never done any wrong; while you, as you must acknowledge, are but a poor, sinful mortal, deserving to lose heaven on account of the original sin inherited from our first parents, and perhaps you have merited hell by many mortal sins committed in the past; He was the sovereign God, you a miserable creature; He suffered willingly for your sake, and that too at the hands of His sworn and most wicked enemies; while what you have to bear is sent you from the hands of your loving God for your own eternal benefit. Why then indulge in such loud murmurs and complaints? "Is it no comfort to you to suffer with Christ?" Is it not an honor, a happiness, a great consolation and joy to suffer from God, with God, and for God's sake.

If want and poverty press hard on you, "think diligently" on your Lord hanging naked on the gibbet of the cross, and not having whereon to lay His head. Is it no comfort to you to be poor with Christ? If you have to endure the pangs of hunger and thirst, if you can hardly find a bit of bread to eat, "think diligently" on the vinegar and gall that Our Lord had to drink. Is it no comfort to you to be hungry and thirsty with Christ? If you are despised and abandoned by all, "think diligently" on Him who was placed below even the vilest robbers and murderers. And should it not console you to find that you hold the lowest place with your God? If you have to bear the sting of wicked, malicious, and uncharitable tongues, and to endure the lash of ridicule, "think diligently" on Him who suffered so many contradictions, who was mocked and sneered at as a fool and madman. Is it no comfort to you to be despised with your God? If you are persecuted, oppressed, tormented unjustly by

That comfort is able to sweeten every trial.

¹ Non tibi satis est cum Phocione mori?

others, "think diligently" on Him who was falsely accused before the tribunals, and most unjustly condemned. Must you not look on it as an honor to suffer injustice with your God? If you are treated ungratefully by those to whom you have done good; if daily annoyances assail you from those with whom you have to live, "think diligently" on Him who was betrayed and sold by one of His own companions and disciples, who was denied by another of them, and who received a buffet in the face from Malchus, whose ear He had healed. Is it no comfort to you to have Christ as your companion in receiving evil for good? If you are visited with all sorts of sickness and bodily ailments, "think diligently" on Him who was scourged till His body became one wound. Should you not rejoice to suffer pain with Christ your Saviour? If the death of a friend leaves you lonesome and sorrowing, think on Him who was abandoned by all His disciples, and was left in extreme desolation even by His heavenly Father. Should it not suffice for you not to be abandoned by Christ? And if the violence of your torment forces you to break out into sighs, and tears, and mournings, and lamentations, "think diligently" on Him who in the garden suffered such anguish that He sweated blood, and had to cry out to heaven for help. Must it not comfort you to be afflicted with Christ! In a word, whatever be your trial, no matter how heavy the cross laid on your shoulders, only think on the crucified Jesus, and you will at once find comfort, alleviation, and refreshment. "If," says St. Gregory, "we only recall to mind the passion of Christ, there is no trouble that we may not bear with equanimity."¹ Oh, how true then the words so often sung by St. Bernard: "When I think of Jesus, my heart is filled with joy!"² And that is especially the case with the just, who love Him truly. Nay, even to sinners this thought of the suffering Redeemer is a comforting and joyful one, as I shall briefly show in the

Second Part.

The sinner can find no comfort.

It is true that when the sinner realizes the miserable state in which he is, there is nothing that can give him any joy or pleasure; for, to be an enemy of God and the object of His hatred, of God who has him at every moment in His hands, and can at

¹ Si passio Christi ad mentem revocetur, nihil adeo durum est, quod non æquanimiter toleretur.

² Jesu, dulcis memoria, dans vera cordis gaudia.

any moment take vengeance on him; to be a slave of the devil, who is only waiting the word to pierce him to the heart and drag him off; to be a child of eternal damnation, to which he has condemned himself by his treason to the Divine Majesty; to be at every minute in danger of death, and therefore to be always standing on the brink of hell: what could be added to such misery that could make it greater? The holy Fathers are amazed at the thought that a man in the state of mortal sin can laugh, eat, drink, sleep, and repose quietly. And unless the sinner is quite hardened and blinded, he must experience in the anguish of his conscience that there is no such thing as true joy for him. Worst of all, the devil, who at first painted the mercy of God in such brilliant colors, and inspired him with such hope therein, so as to take from him the fear of sinning, after the criminal act has been accomplished, takes all hope from him again, and portrays the divine justice as most implacable and strict, thus filling him with fear and anguish, and finally hurling him into the depths of despair.

But take courage, O sinners! Even in the wretched state in which you are, there is comfort for you and reason for rejoicing! “Think diligently on Him that endured such opposition from sinners against Himself.” Think on the passion and death of Jesus Christ your Saviour; that one thought will drive away the dark clouds of trouble and despair from your minds. For then you will behold the wounds of Him who was crucified for your sins, the blood He shed for you, the heart that was pierced for you, the outspread arms that are waiting to receive you when you repent. “Will the Lord,” asks St. Bernard, “cast out him when coming with a contrite heart whom He sought so diligently?”¹ Will that Lord, who prayed for those who nailed Him to the cross, refuse to pardon you if you repent? Will that Lord, who gave up His life with such unspeakable love for you to save you from hell, condemn you when you wish to repent? If He could do such a thing, He surely would have remained in heaven, where He would not have been obliged to suffer such a death. For, as St. Paul says, to the comfort of all sinners, “Christ Jesus came into this world to save sinners.”²

But in the recollection of the passion he can console himself with the hope of forgiveness.

Even the worst sin-

It is true that you have grossly offended Him; but it is also true that He has shed His blood for you, and suffered a painful

¹ *Namquid eum, quem Dominus quaesivit, venientem ejiciet foras?*

² *Christus Jesus venit in hunc mundum peccatores salvos facere.—I. Tim. 1. 15.*

ner, then,
must not
despair.

death for you. It is true that you do not deserve any grace from Him of yourself; but it is also true that His merits can earn grace for you. If your sins cry out to heaven for vengeance, yet His blood cries out still louder for mercy and pardon. If the heavy load of your sins presses you down into the pit of hell; yet the still heavier weight of His death lifts you up again. If, like the debtor in the gospel, you owe the Divine Justice many millions, and have not a single penny to pay the debt, yet Jesus goes bail for you, and He is able to pay His heavenly Father infinitely more than any debt you can incur. He has left behind an inexhaustible treasure in the sacrament of penance, if you only wish to make use of it to pay your debt. If you have long ago lost your suit, as far as your eternal lot is concerned, and brought on yourself the sentence of everlasting damnation, yet Jesus is your Advocate; He can make your cause good again, and bring it to a successful issue. Hear what St. John says in his first epistle: "My little children, these things I write to you that you may not sin. But if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the just: and He is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for those of the whole world."¹ Do not then say in despair like Cain: "My iniquity is greater than that I may deserve pardon."² It is not the case; if you alone had committed all the sins of the world, nay, if you had committed an infinite number of sins, yet one sigh sent forth by Our Lord to His heavenly Father is infinitely sufficient to blot them all out; what then cannot be done by the torrent of blood He shed for you? See, O sinner, what comfort there is for you in the recollection of the passion of Christ! Whenever, then, the demons afflict you by reminding you of the number of your sins, and thus try to make you despair, turn your mind at once to the Crucified, and say with St. Bernard: "I have sinned grievously! My conscience is disturbed, but not dismayed, because I will remember the wounds of Our Lord; and what wound is so mortal as not to be healed by the death of Christ?"³

Sighs of the
hopeful

O dying Jesus! O comfort and joy of my heart! Yes, I acknowledge that I have sinned very often and grievously! My

¹ Filii mei, hæc scribo vobis ut non peccatis. Sed etsi quis peccaverit, advocatum habemus apud Patrem, Jesum Christum justum; et ipse est propitiatio pro peccatis nostris: non pro nostris autem tantum, sed etiam pro totius mundi.—1. John ii. 1, 2.

² Major est iniquitas mea, quam ut veniam merear.—Gen. iv. 13.

³ Peccavi peccatum grande! Turbatur conscientia, sed non perturbatur; quoniam vulnerum Domini recordabor; quid tam ad mortem, quod non Christi morte salvetur?

mind is thereby disturbed and filled with fear, nor do I deserve any better; for I should by rights be rejected by Thee forever! Nor could I dare to indulge in any hope of regaining Thy grace, nor even to lift up my eyes to heaven, lest the fate I have merited should befall me; but I cast my eyes on Thy cross as the only anchor of my hope! Let those despair who do not believe in Thee; but how could my soul go to such extremes, since it is certain Thou hast died for me? No wound can be so mortal as not to be healed by Thy death. If Thou shouldst wish to destroy me, oh, then one glance of Thine anger were enough to drive my soul into hell! But Thou hast changed Thy heavenly throne for the shameful cross; and why? To show me, not the severity of Thy justice, but the mildness of Thy infinite goodness and mercy. Show this then in me, show that Thy outstretched arms have not less power to receive a sinner, who is now humbled and confesses his guilt, than to punish the sinner who persists in his wickedness and refuses to do penance. I will repent, gracious Lord, with Thy grace, which I hope Thou wilt not refuse me! And with that same grace of Thine I will lead a better life in future, avoid all sin, and persevere constantly in Thy service and love until death. Such is again my determination: whether I am a just man or a sinner, whether things go well or ill with me, when my soul remembers Jesus it will be filled with consolation and joy.¹ My dear brethren, “think diligently” of this, and you will have that consolation too. Amen.

EIGHTH SERMON.

**ON THE ADVANTAGE OF MEDITATING ON THE SUFFERINGS
OF CHRIST.**

Subject.

The meditation of the sufferings of Christ is useful: 1, for the good, that they may persevere; 2, for sinners, that they may abstain from evil.—*Preached on the Wednesday of the second week in Lent.*

Text.

Christo igitur passo in carne, et vos eadem cogitatione armamini.—I. Pet. iv. 1.

“Christ therefore having suffered in the flesh, be you also armed with the same thought.”

¹ *Jesus dulcis memoria, dans vera cordis gaudia.*

Introduction.

If there are some whom honor impels to a certain mode of action, there are still more who are moved by mildness, and by far the greater number find no more powerful attraction than their own profit. My dear brethren, I have hitherto endeavored to encourage you to the frequent recollection of the sufferings and death of Christ, because that recollection is no more than what gratitude claims from us for the great love shown us by the suffering Redeemer, and because it is moreover a most consoling and comforting thought for the just, as well as for sinners. But now I mean to show the profit we may derive from it, and I say:

Plan of Discourse.

The frequent recollection of the passion and death of Christ is useful for the pious, that they may persevere constantly in good: the first part. It is useful for the wicked, that they may abstain from sin: the second part.

I rely on the help of the intercession of Mary and of our holy guardian angels.

What most hinders us in the affair of salvation is the fear of evil or the hope of good.

There are, generally speaking, two things that impede us on the way to heaven, prevent us from attending to the service of God and to the business of our souls, and so hinder us from persevering: namely, the fear of some evil that frightens us from the road of virtue, or the hope of some good that illures to sin. The fear of some evil, such as, for instance, great difficulty or discomfort, the mortification of the inward and outward senses, the chastening of the flesh, dishonor and contempt, calamities or contradictions of whatever kind they be, that have to be overcome in the service of God, and that render the road to heaven rugged and hard; the hope of some good, such as sensual pleasure, the lusts of the flesh, honor and the esteem of men, money and riches, the gratification of our desires, the love of creatures, and so on, which make the road of sin easy and pleasant, although it leads to hell—these are the arms with which our three sworn enemies, the devil, the world, and the flesh, unceasingly attack us; and how sharp and grievous their attacks are we know, alas! only too well by the daily and hourly most deplorable loss of so many precious souls who, either tired of these evils, or attracted, blinded, and fascinated by these goods, give up their patience, innocence, justice, love of God and their neighbor, consent to sin, and so leave

the road to heaven, and wander away on the broad highway that leads to hell. Would to God that this were not the case!

Now, my dear brethren, what are we to do so as to withstand constantly those assaults, to fight our fierce enemies with courage, and to persevere to the end in goodness and the friendship of God? "Be you armed," says the holy apostle St. Peter, in the words of my text. You must take up arms against arms. What arms? "Christ, therefore, having suffered in the flesh, be you also armed with the same thought: for he that hath suffered in the flesh hath ceased from sins: that now he may live the rest of his time in the flesh, not after the desires of men, but according to the will of God."¹ Whereon St. Thomas of Aquin says: "With reason does the apostle say 'be you armed'; because the recollection of the passion strengthens and defends us against assaults and temptations."² In the same way St. Bernard tells us that the cross of Christ has such power, that when we remember it rightly "no lust nor wish to sin can prevail in us, for this recollection can put to flight a whole army of sins."³ St. John Damascene calls the cross of Christ "the staff of the weak."⁴ A staff serves a twofold purpose; it supports and defends. One who is not firm on his feet, and has to walk on a slippery way, must laboriously creep along, or else if he walks upright, he will soon stumble and fall; but if he has a staff to lean on, it serves as a third foot, so that he can with little danger and great speed accomplish his journey. A dog attacks you in the street; if you only show him your stick he will continue to bark at you, but will not attempt to come near and bite you. Such a staff is the passion and cross of Christ, the recollection and meditation of which strengthens and protects us on the slippery road of this temporal life amongst the dangers that threaten us from the allurements of the world and its delights and goods, and from the impetuous assaults of the fear of evil; for we learn from it to despise both.

By meditating on the passion we learn to despise both.

Because, to come to the root of the matter, if I consider my suffering and dying Saviour, I either believe, or not, that He who thus suffers is God. If not, I am not a Christian; but if I be-

For we find that God despised both.

¹ Quia qui passus est in carne, desit a peccatis, ut jam non desideris hominum, sed voluntati Dei, quod reliquum est in carne vivat temporis.—I. Pet. iv. 1, 2.

² Bene dicit armamini; quia memoria passionis contra insultus et tentationes roborat nos et munit.

³ Nulla libido, nulla peccati praevalere possit invidia, sed continuo ad hanc memoriam peccati exercitus fugetur.

⁴ Baculum infirmorum.

lieve Him to be God, I must also acknowledge that He is infinite perfection, who contains in Himself all good without exception; and that He cannot take any evil on Himself; I acknowledge too that He is infinite wisdom, that He cannot err in His judgments nor be deceived, that He knows how to value everything according to its worth, that He must love and choose what is good, hate and reject what is evil. Hence I am convinced that what He chooses cannot be a real evil, and, on the other hand, what He rejects cannot be a true good. But what did Christ choose in this world? Of riches, honors, high places, comforts, sensual joys I find no trace in His whole life, and much less in the end of His life; but rather quite the contrary. If I go in thought to the Garden of Gethsemani, I find Him in the utmost affliction, sadness, melancholy, fear, and anguish, lying on His face, drowned, as it were, in a sea of bitterness; if I go with Him to the house of Caiphas, I see Him buffeted as a liar and false prophet, and spat upon as a blasphemer; if I go to the court of Herod, I behold Him mocked as a fool by a whole army; if I accompany Him to the tribunal of Pilate, I hear the sound of the rods and scourges that tear His most tender body from head to foot, and flay and rend it in the most cruel manner; if I go to the place of execution on Mount Calvary, I behold with amazement the great God hanging and dying on a gallows as the worst of criminals, between two thieves, suspended there in mid-air without comfort, help, or pity, suffering the extremity of hunger, thirst, desolation, and agony. In a word, His whole passion represents Him to me according to the words of the Prophet, as a worm, and not a man, as a thing trodden under foot; and all that He took on Himself because He wished it, and chose it of His own free will: "Because it was His own will."¹

Hence we must conclude that those are not real goods nor real evils.

Enter now, my soul, into thyself with these thoughts! Art thou perhaps better, wiser, more intelligent than thy sovereign God? He might just as well have chosen joys and delights, for all His actions, no matter of what kind they are, are of infinite value; and yet for thy salvation He rejected those, and chose nothing but suffering, discomfort, difficulties, shame, mockery, poverty, death; so that in these latter there can be no real evil, nor in the former real good. But if there is no evil in them, why art thou afraid of them? why should they deter thee from virtue, devotion, and the service and love of God? If in the former there is

¹ Quia ipse voluit.--Is. liii. 7.

Advantage of Meditating on Christ's Sufferings. 95

nothing good, why dost thou desire them so earnestly, seek them so eagerly, keep them so carefully? How can such childish toys allure to wickedness, lead to sin, and turn thee away from God and from heaven?

Where is then thy faith, thy reason and understanding? How does it harmonize with thy belief to have such an example in thy God Himself, and, as if He had not rightly understood the matter, to order thy life differently from His? What God seeks and loves, that is hated, shunned, and avoided by man! What God contemns and despises, therein we seek our pleasure and happiness! How does that consist with thy faith? God wishes to be put to shame and humiliated, and we allow ourselves to be turned away from His service by the desire of vain praise, or the fear of some trifling humiliation! God wishes to be poor and die poor, naked, and deserted, and a handful of lucre can bring us to such a point that we cease altogether to serve God! God willingly and for our sake embraces the cross with all imaginable pains and torments, while the least discomfort or difficulty takes from us all courage in His service; a few moments' pleasure, so to speak, takes our hearts away from Him completely! Is that the way to be a Christian, a servant and disciple of Christ? If a heathen, a Jew, who holds Christ for a traitor, and His sufferings a folly, were to act in that way, it should not surprise me; but such conduct cannot be explained in one who bears the name of a Christian, and is publicly recognized as such. And how many are there not who live in that manner? What is the reason of this? Whence comes it? St. Bernard is of the opinion that those people do not really believe that the suffering Christ is truly God. They indeed profess to believe with the lips, but in truth and in their hearts they deny it as if they were heathens. For, asks St. John, who is he that conquers the world and its goods and imaginary evils? "Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?"¹ If then we allow ourselves to be frightened from good by the false evils of the world, or to be allured to sin by its false goods, we have not a lively faith in Christ, or at least,—and this seems to me the more probable,—we do not understand what we believe; we do not think, or consider, or meditate on the fact that Christ suffered such torments for us, that He died such a shameful death on the cross. This want of thought and consideration, that should serve us as arms

And that he who allows them to lead him to evil has not a lively faith.

¹ *Quis est qui vincit mundum, nisi qui credit quoniam Jesus est Filius Dei?*—I. John v. 5.

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to defend us from the attacks of our enemies, is often the cause that we so easily turn aside and become slaves of the flesh, the world, and the devil.

Confession of past faults, and purpose often to think of the passion.

Yes, my crucified God! I now know where the fault began with me! why I have been so inconstant in Thy service, so cold and vacillating in Thy love hitherto! I have thought little of Thy sufferings and death, or else perhaps now and then a passing recollection of them has occurred to my imagination. I have been kept from zeal and devotion by nothing more than a slight difficulty; I have been betrayed into an inordinate love of creatures by nothing more than a momentary pleasure or some anticipated enjoyment. If I had recalled Thee to my mind in a lively manner, and taken deeply to heart the shame, disgrace, and death Thou hast suffered, then indeed, if I had only a glimmering of reason left, I should have learned in the recollection of Thy bitter passion to overcome all difficulties, to despise all delights and pleasures. If I had but a glimmering of right feeling left, the thought that Thou hast loved me even to death should never have permitted me to be so easily drawn away from Thy love. Henceforward Thy sufferings shall be the object of my thoughts; the recollection of them shall be the staff on which I shall lean, by which I shall keep myself fast in all occasions and dangers of sin, in all the assaults and temptations of the evil one, in all the flatteries and allurements of the perverse world, in all the seductions of the pleasure-seeking flesh; so that I may remain steadfast in Thy love, in the zealous purpose of serving Thee alone, with which I now begin. I go on to the

Second Part.

Nothing shows the malice of sin more than the passion of Christ.

Sinner! Christ has suffered; "Be you also armed with the same thought"! You cannot desire or ask for a greater advantage than to be deterred from sin, which is the evil of all evils; nor is there any better means of showing you the malice of every mortal sin, and thus inspiring you with a horror of it, than the meditation of the sufferings and death of Christ. If you have already become so perverted in your judgments as to despise what the most wise Saviour chose and loved, and to seek and desire what He contemned and rejected; if you have lost all sense of honor, so that the infinite love shown you by Christ in His passion cannot move you to gratitude and win you to love Him in return; if your heart is no longer human, so that no pity for

your agonizing Redeemer can keep you from sin, and you still, according to the words of St. Paul, crucify and put Him to death anew; yet must you fear and tremble when you consider the punishments with which the most just and at the same time good God chastises even one grievous sin; a punishment that can be realized in no way better than by considering the history of the passion of the suffering Saviour. The pains of hell do indeed show how grievous and wicked it is to offend God; for the Lord of infinite justice and mercy could not condemn to eternal fire for a single sin committed by a momentary thought a soul made to His own image, if that sin were so slight a fault as we often imagine. Yet the pains of hell are a mere shadow compared to the vengeance taken by the divine justice on sin on Mount Calvary. For in hell God punishes the rebellious servant who has presumptuously stood up against Him; but there He demands that terrible atonement from His own most holy, innocent, and beloved Son, and that too only on account of the sins of others, showing thereby that the injured honor of an infinite God cannot be restored unless by a God like to Himself. Hence St. Bernard says: "If you wish to know how grievous sin is, go in thought to that mount on which the Son of God died, and see, O man! how great are the wounds for which it was necessary for Christ to be wounded."¹

To show this more clearly I shall make use of a parable taken from St. Vincent Ferrer. Four robbers had been plying their trade for some time in a certain town, and as they had acquired an amount of notoriety there, they determined to go elsewhere. Hardly had they entered the other town when they beheld a beautifully-clad youth hanging on a gallows; they stood still, petrified with amazement, and asked a passer-by who the youth was. He, was the answer, was the only son of the mayor of our town. What! such a noble youth! And who hanged him? His own father, was the answer. And, continued they, what fault had the son committed? One of the servants of our mayor, such was the reply, was guilty of theft, and was imprisoned until sentence should be pronounced on him. But the son, who loved the servant, begged his father to release him, and offered himself as a hostage for him in case he should escape. The servant managed to get out of the prison, and the son had to take his place; so that

Shown by a
parable.

¹ Agnosce. O homo, quam gravia sint vulnera, pro quibus necesse fuit Christum Dominum vulnerari.

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the father, a strict judge, had him hanged on the gallows as you see. Ho! ho! thought the thieves, this is no place for us! Comrade, said one to the other, it will never do for us to ply our trade here. Let us be off at once! If the judge is so strict as to hang his own son for a theft committed by another, what would he do to us if he caught us? We must mind what we are about! Such was the conclusion these thieves arrived at by using their own reason, and it was enough to make them give up their evil ways. It is easy to understand what is meant by this parable. Sinner! are you still minded to persist in your wickedness? Can you still consent to a single sin? Before doing so, go in thought to the hill outside Jerusalem, and there you will see a man hanging on a gallows, in most wretched plight, cruelly done to death; ask who He is. He is the infinitely beautiful, only-begotten, eternal Son of God: And who has put Him so cruelly to death? His own heavenly Father: "Whom God hath proposed," as St. Paul says, "to the showing of His justice."¹ Why so? What fault had He committed? Adam, a servant of God, had committed a theft in paradise; contrary to the divine command he stole a single apple, and ate it; this Son of God became a hostage for him, and as the servant was not in a condition to pay, the heavenly Father seized on His own divine Son, and delivered Him to the executioners to be put to death. "For the wickedness of My people have I struck Him."²

Hence he is
obstinate
who is not
deterred
from sin by
that con-
sideration.

What are your feelings when you think of this, O miserable and blind mortal? Have you not good reason for fear and trembling? If the whole world could not pay for one sin, if the Son of God Himself had to offer such terrible satisfaction for it, how great, how fearfully wicked must not every mortal sin be! Oh, then, it cannot be right to go on and commit even one sin more; and it is high time to abstain from all injustice, impurity, dangerous company, enmity, and all vices: "For if in the green wood they do these things, what shall be done in the dry?"³ If the green and fruitful tree is cast into the fire, what must the dry, useless, and barren stem expect? If God did not spare His only Son, whom He loved infinitely from eternity, what vengeance will He take on the servant? If He allowed His only Son, who is innocence itself, and cannot sin, to be crucified and put to

¹ Quem proposuit Deus ad ostensionem justitiæ suæ.—Rom. iii. 25.

² Propter scelus populi mei percussit eum.—Is. liii. 8.

³ Quia si in viridi ligno hæc faciunt, in arido quid fiet?—Luke xxiii. 31.

death for the sins of others, how will He act towards me, a wretched sinner, for my own sins, that are so many, so grievous, and so often committed? If Christ had to suffer and die merely because He put on the garment and outward appearance of a sinner, and offered Himself as a hostage for others, how will it be with me, who not only bear the name of sinner, but am one in reality, and have often trampled under foot in a most wicked manner the blood of this divine Son? If a divine person of infinite perfection had to be punished so severely, what have I, a miserable mortal, to expect, who have hitherto done nothing to honor my God, but rather much to dishonor Him, unless I do penance and amend? O sin! sin! how easily thou art committed; and how dear thou hast cost the Son of God! Shall I then in future have any pleasure in doing that which, if the Almighty had not come already, would oblige Him to come down from heaven and become man, and be crucified and put to death? And if that God has already satisfied for my sins, does that lessen their malice? Ah, no! That very circumstance makes them still more grievous, on account both of the clearer knowledge of their malice which we can gather from this satisfaction and the greater ingratitude for such unheard-of love.

O Christ Jesus, most loving Saviour! Thy bitter death opens my eyes, so that, unless I wilfully blind myself to the truth, I must acknowledge the incomprehensible malice and gravity of an offence or insult offered Thee! Would that I had thought of this sooner! For how would it then have been possible for me to allow myself to be led so often into sin for some wretched thing? I tremble when I think of it! I am worse than the demons themselves! For would Lucifer even have dared to sin against Thee if he had known that the sins of another would be punished in Thee by such a fearful death, by such bitter torments? But I have learned this by the true faith, and yet I have not been deterred from sinning again. So that the sins I have committed after Thy passion are far worse than the sin of the demons themselves. Ah, I know this to be the case! I execrate my presumption, and will now cease offending Thee! I am ready to punish myself by true penance for the dishonor I have done Thee. But all I can do is infinitely too small. Wretch that I am! I have been able to offend Thee, O sovereign God, but no one except a God can atone for the offence! Ah, accept then the

Acknowledgment of the gravity of sin, contrition and purpose of amendment.

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pains and the hatred which Thy divine Son has suffered for my sins; accept the superabundant satisfaction that He has offered for me, and by that I beg of Thee to be appeased and to have mercy on me! Amen.

ON THE SUFFERINGS AND DEATH OF CHRIST.

NINTH SERMON.

ON THE CONSIDERATION OF THE LOVE OF CHRIST IN HIS SUFFERINGS AND DEATH.

Subject.

The unheard-of love of Christ for us mortals in dying for us.—*Preached on Good Friday in the oratory of His Highness.*

Text.

Inclinato capite tradidit spiritum.—John xix. 30.
“And bowing His head He gave up the ghost.”

Introduction.

So that at last it has come to such a pass that Jesus must die! “Hear, O ye heavens! the things I speak; let the earth give ear to the words of my mouth!”¹ Hear, all ye elements, what I am about to say! Christ Jesus, the immortal Son of God, is dead! He who made you in the beginning out of nothing has drawn His last breath! God has bowed down His head and given up the ghost! The earth trembles, the heavens are darkened and clothe themselves with a gloomy mourning garment; the sun flees away; the stars hide themselves; the angels of peace begin to weep bitterly; all nature suffers, as it were, a trance; everything is smitten with dumbness through sorrow and amazement. Hear, then, ye men, ye Christians, ye just, ye sinners! whom this tragedy chiefly concerns. Jesus has given up the ghost! Give me your thoughts now! Lend me your hearts and minds! Your thoughts, I say, for words fail me when all things are mute with horror; I cannot speak when God is dying on a gibbet. Yet so numerous are the thoughts that crowd on my mind, that ravished, as it were,

¹ *Audite, cœli, quæ loquor, audiat terra verba oris mei.*—Deut. xxxii. 1.

out of myself, I know not which to give utterance to first. Love, hatred, rage, anger, fear, despair, hope, joy, sorrow—all the affections of the soul begin to arise in me at once. Love for a God who loves me even to such a death; hatred, anger, rage against myself and my sins, that I know to be the cause of that foul murder; fear, terror, and despair at the thought of the death that awaits me a poor sinner, since the innocent Son of God was obliged to suffer such a cruel death for the sins of others; hope and comfort in the thought that He will have mercy on me, who offered an infinite satisfaction for an infinite number of sins; joy on account of the accomplishment of the work of the redemption of the world; sorrow and pity for my dear Lord who suffered so much. Love, as the chief of those feelings, shall have the preference to-day, and mingled with sorrow and grief, shall briefly and quietly pay the last offices to the dying Saviour.

Plan of Discourse.

The unheard-of love of Christ for us men in dying for us. Such is the subject of this meditation.

I begin, relying on the help of Him who loved us unto death, and on the intercession of His Mother Mary, who was so afflicted at His death, and on that of our holy guardian angels.

In all its circumstances the love of Christ in dying for us is unheard of.

Lift up your thoughts then, Christian souls! Lift up your thoughts to that mount on which, on this great day of sorrow, the most terrible and amazing mystery is exhibited to the world! See, there the Creator hangs on the gallows, in mid-air, and has given up His life for His creatures! No other circumstance need we consider; this one thought is enough to explain to us this wonderful work of love. The Creator, I say, dies for the creature, God for men! A love the like of which neither heaven nor earth has heard of till to-day; a love than which no greater can be hoped for by man, nor imagined by an angel, nor shown by God Himself, whether we consider the Person who loves, or the person who is loved, or the way and manner of showing the love. For He who loves is the sovereign Lord and God; he who is loved is a poor and wicked servant; the way of showing the love is incomprehensible, and therefore it is called by the Apostle expressive: "For His exceeding charity wherewith He loved us."¹

And that too after having

For it was not enough for His love that He, the great God, should be born for our sake as a poor beggar's child on a hand-

¹ Propter nimiam charitatem suam qua dilexit nos.—Ephes. ii. 4.

ful of straw in a stable. Not enough that He should live in the world for three and thirty years as a lowly tradesman in the greatest poverty and contempt. Not enough that He should give Himself to us as our food and drink in the Blessed Sacrament in such a wonderful manner, that He might be with us always. Not enough that He should take on Himself such terrible mental anguish, that the sweat ran through His garments in great drops of blood to the ground. Not enough that He should be sold, like a dumb beast on the market, to His enemies for a few pieces of silver; that He should be seized as a thief by the officers of the law, dragged through the public streets of the city like a dog, hurried from one tribunal to another, and there accused and condemned. Not enough that His sacred countenance, more beautiful than that of any angel, should be defiled by the buffets and spittle of a rabble horde; that He should be exposed naked to a vast crowd of people, and be so torn and mangled with scourges, rods, and chains that, as the Prophet says, He looked more like a worm than a man. Not enough that, crowned with thorns and clad in a white mantle like a fool, and in a torn purple garment as a mock king, He should be scoffed and laughed at, persecuted as a robber, and condemned to the gallows, being Himself obliged to carry the heavy wood of the cross on His shoulders up the steep hill. Not enough that at last He should be fastened with blunt nails, hand and foot, to the cross between two murderers, thus publicly treated as if He were the vilest of men; abandoned by angels and men, and even by His heavenly Father Himself, while He hung for three hours struggling with death in the most intense pain. All this was not enough to show His love for us. And what still remained for Him to do? Nothing than to give His life, His last breath, His spirit, which was even trembling on His lips. And this too He gave at last, in order to satisfy His extraordinary love: "And bowing His head He gave up the ghost." Bowing His head to you and me, as if He wished to utter with His last sigh the words of the dying Isaac to his son Esau: "And after this, what shall I do more for thee, my son?"¹ Behold, O man, thou hast all that I have! •

For my part, O God, who hast just died for me, I can only ask in the deepest amazement with Thy servant David: "What is man that Thou art mindful of him?"² But if he is not worthy

already suffered so much for us.

Although we are unworthy of all love.

¹ Et post hæc, fili mi, ultra quid faciam? Gen. xxvii. 37.

² Quid est homo, quod memor es ejus?—Ps. viii. 5.

that Thou shouldst think of him, what then is man, that Thou shouldst die for him, and that, too, such a cruel death? Faith assures me that such is the case; but one thing far surpasses my comprehension, namely, why Thou hast loved me, and why Thou hast loved me so much. Alas! what hast Thou found in me worthy of love, when I was still a mere nothing, and should have remained nothing if Thou hadst not created me out of sheer generosity? Hast Thou, perhaps, loved me for Thy own advantage? Ah, what could I give Thee that I had not already received from Thee? Wouldst Thou not have been the same God of infinite happiness even without my salvation, and with my damnation, which I deserved by my sins? O my Saviour! what hast Thou then loved in me? Perhaps Thy honor? What! hast Thou sought Thy honor in me, although Thou must have well foreseen that I should dishonor and despise Thee most presumptuously by many and grievous sins? Is then the faithless, disobedient, and wicked servant an honor to his master? Does he not deserve hatred rather than favor? Why then hast Thou loved me? I find no other reason but that Thy own goodness so willed it, in order to bring me to eternal life, who merited eternal ruin.

No such love can be shown by one man to another.

O infinitely good God! if Thou must love me, why dost Thou show such an excess of love? A single sigh sent forth by Thee to heaven would more than suffice for the salvation of the whole world. Why then that shameful death on the gibbet? A single tear shed by Thee would have been enough; why then that torrent of blood? A single word uttered to the Father by Thee for us would have been more than enough; why then wert Thou pleased to endure such terrible torments, and to give up the ghost with head bowed down? This, again, I cannot understand! Could I expect such an excessive love from a mortal like myself? St. Paulinus, to rescue the son of a widow from slavery, became a slave himself, and the world wondered at him. A soldier goes through fire and sword, and into the jaws of death for his sovereign, the courtier for his prince, the servant for his master, and this is looked on as striking proof of love and fidelity. But what is it all in comparison to the love Thou hast shown me? Who ever heard that the master allowed himself to be gibbeted and put to death for his servant, the prince and emperor for his poor and, indeed, ungrateful slave? And even if that ever happened, it would be done by one man for another. But Thou, O great God,

doct it for me, a poor mortal! "We dare say, and maintain it to be true," says St. Denis the Areopagite with good reason, "that even God is beside Himself through the greatness of His love for us."¹

O mortals! where are your hearts? If you have any, why are they not transfixed with love? Can there be any one who does not return such a love? Is it possible that a Christian can offend and hate the God who died for him? Truly, if there be such a one, heaven and earth should shrink from him as from a monster. That there should be one man in the world thus loved by God, who does not love God in return, appears almost impossible to St. Paul; and therefore, speaking of Our Lord, he writes to the Romans: "Whom God hath proposed to be a propitiation, through faith in His blood, to the showing of His justice, for the remission of former sins."² The Apostle knew well that the Son of God died not only for past, but also for future sins; but He looked on it as impossible that a man could be so ungrateful and unnatural as to offend the God whom he knew to have died for him on the gibbet of the cross. And hence he says: "for the remission of former sins."

He must be a monster who does not return such love.

O holy Apostle, thou hast reason for thy opinion; but look down now on the world of to-day, and see how mistaken you are! Ah! where shall we find a true love of Jesus Christ? With most Christians we must seek it in the word only, on the lips; for their works show something quite different! Well might Our Lord now sigh, as thou didst before: "I am afraid of you, lest perhaps I have labored in vain among you."³ To no purpose have I shed My blood; to no purpose have I been crucified; to no purpose have I given up the ghost. Most men hate and persecute Me: "Instead of making Me a return of love, they detracted Me... and they repaid Me, evil for good, and hatred for My love."⁴ I have given My body, My soul, My goods, My blood, My life, and all that is in Me as a sacrifice for them; but they give all they have to another; their heart and soul are sacrificed to an impure love, their mind to pride, their eyes to vanity, their ears to uncharitable discourse, their tongue to cursing and swearing,

And yet the smaller number love Him: most people have hitherto hated Him.

¹ *Audebitus et hoc pro veritate dicere, quod ipse quoque Deus præ magnitudine amoris extra se sit.*

² *Quem proposuit Deus propitiationem, per fidem in sanguine ipsius, ad ostensionem justitiæ suæ propter remissionem præcedentium delictorum.*—Rom. iii. 25.

³ *Timeo vos, ne forte sine causa laboraverim in vobis.*—Gal. iv. 11.

⁴ *Pro eo ut me diligenter, detrahebant mihi. Et posuerunt adversum me mala pro bonis, et odium pro dilectione mea.*—Ps. cviii. 4, 5.

their hands to injustice, their feet to frequenting dangerous company, their whole body to folly, to sensuality, to unlawful pleasures. For Me they have nothing left but hatred for My love. Their members are so many weapons that they use to torment and crucify Me.

**And will
continue to
hate Him.**

Alas! dearest Lord, all this is only too true! I compassionate the death Thou didst suffer for love! How long a time has now elapsed since men have ceased thus to rage against Thee? If this day of sorrow has perhaps kept some from their wantonness and sinful habits, how long will that last? In a few weeks (alas! even that is too long!), let but a few days or hours pass, and how will men deal with Thee again? The world will come with its fripperies and offer a breath of honor, that passes by like the sound of the bell, and what will the ambitious man do to Thee? He will choose the favor and good opinion of men, and willingly renounce Thine, and so he will again crown Thee with thorns. A mere creature will entice him with some carnal pleasure, that vanishes in a moment, and the unchaste man will snatch at this joy eagerly, and thus scourge Thee again from head to foot. The devil will hold out from afar a handful of money that vanishes like water, and the avaricious man will snap at it, and sell Thee for thirty pence. Let one say to another but a word of contradiction, and the vindictive man will avenge himself, and thus again condemn Thee to death. In a word, for a little sensual delight, for a mere toy, for nothing, the sinner will leave Thee, and, as the Apostle says, again crucify Thee. See, O God! such is the conduct of those for whom Thou didst die; they act in that way now; they will continue so to act. That is the thanks they give Thee for Thy great love! The world has not suffered martyrdom for them; no mortal has suffered or died for them; the devil has not been tortured for them as Thou hast been; and yet these find lovers everywhere. Mercy to a poor mortal has brought Thee to the pitch of giving up the ghost for love, and Thou promisest moreover the riches of heaven to those who love Thee in return; and yet Thou canst not induce men to leave off saddening Thee; they mock at Thee, and sin in spite of Thy love and the sufferings Thou didst endure. God is dead! but what matters it? God is, as it were, again put to death! but what of that? Whatever favors the flesh and its appetites, that has the preference. Thou, O Lord, as if Thou wert the vilest of all, must give way to all creatures! There is hardly anything in the

world that men do not love, with the exception of Thee alone, O God of love! Every one loves the father to whom he owes his being; the master who is kind to him; the servant who is faithful to him; the horse that does his work; the dog that is watchful; the vilest animal that is useful; but very few, O Lord of all, O heavenly Father, O most faithful Saviour, who lovest unto death! very few love Thee as they ought; the greater number hate and afflict Thee in every way possible. See, I say again, that is the thanks Thou hast for dying for us!

O ungrateful world! is that the return thou makest for the benefits bestowed on thee by thy Redeemer? Has He loved thee excessively that He might find in thee another executioner, another murderer to lead Him anew to death? Hear, ye angels and heavenly citizens, who cannot understand or sufficiently admire this great love of your sovereign Lord! Hear, ye men, and all on earth who have any spark of right feeling left! O Mary, Mother of sorrows! O pious women who wept and mourned at the death of the Lord! Hear, ye unhappy spirits and inhabitants of the infernal regions, to whom such love is not granted! Hear, if ye may, ye lions and tigers, and ye denizens of the wilderness, who, although you have not the gift of reason, are yet thankful to your Creator! Hear, ye dogs, that leap and spring in gratitude if one gives you but a bare bone to gnaw! Hear, whoever has ears to hear! God loves man even to death, and man loves God hardly for one day! God has given His life for man, and still man will not love God! He prefers to give his soul to the hellish spirit, who will torture him forever, rather than to God, who died for his salvation. He makes a friend of the devil, rather than of God, who redeemed him! O ingratitude, O folly, the like of which cannot be found!

My soul, what dost thou say and think of this? Art thou still cold, senseless, stony, in spite of this divine fire of love? When a man loves thee, he wins thy heart, and that too often to thy ruin; a slight joy, a passing pleasure delights thee; and must this great love of God have no effect on thee? Eh! show now, at least, that thou hast a human heart! Is there nothing in Jesus that can attract thee? Dost thou find in Him nothing worth loving? Art thou still minded to go on offending Him? But why? Wherein has He done anything to harm thee? Ah, my Lord, I may well ask that question! What hast Thou done to me? What else but everything that is good? That I am, that

What excessive ingratitude!

Contrite sighs of love for having ever offended God.

I live, that I am a Christian, that I am a Catholic, belonging to the true faith in preference to so many others, that I am not like so many others in hell on account of my sins; in a word, all that I am, can do, have, see, hear, enjoy, all is the effect of Thy generosity, Thy goodness to me. Should I not, therefore, have loved Thee long ago, and above all things? Thee, who art beauty itself, deserving of all love, and alone art worthy of being loved infinitely before and above all else? But alas! what have I done to Thee? I have not loved Thee; my heart has remained unmoved and turned rebelliously away from Thee. For a wretched thing that I should be ashamed to make known to decent society, I have rejected Thee and driven Thee out of my heart. Thou knowest this, O Lord! But now that I see Thee, my sovereign God, dying for my sake on the shameful cross, I can resist no longer. My heart is touched; I throw myself down before Thy cross and Thy tomb, full of sorrow and shame and grief at the thought of how little I have loved Thee hitherto. O sin, now I know thee for the evil thou art, since the Son of God has had to die on thy account! Oh, wo to me, wicked wretch that I am! And what more terrible name can I give myself? Monster that I am, by my sins I have caused the death of my God, my truest Lover, my best Friend, my dearest Father! O sorrow! O grief! O tears! where are ye now? This is the place for you. Come upon me freely! I give myself up to you altogether, and resign myself into your hands.

Purpose
never more
to offend
Him on any
account.

Oh, would that all creatures were turned into hearts and tongues, that they might help me to praise, honor, and love my dearest Lord, whom, alas, I have offended! Where are you now, wicked counsellors, bad men, treacherous companions, caressing creatures, flattering joys, sensual pleasures, ambition, avarice, anger, envy, human respect, and all of you that have kept me by sin from the love of my Saviour? Where are you? I abhor you forever! I swear to you that you will never more find room in me! Farewell to you! I love only my God who died for me. All ye places in which I shall ever be in future, you shall be witnesses of how I repent of my sins and love my God, and serve Him faithfully and zealously. Ah, would that I had done that long ago! You, my eyes, shall be torn out of my head before you lend yourselves again to dangerous glances. You, my ears, shall be cut off before you listen to uncharitable or wicked conversation. You, my tongue, shall turn dumb before you in-

jure the honor of God or of my neighbor. You, my hands, shall wither away before being stretched forth to dishonest gains. You, my feet, shall be crippled before you bring me again to that house, that occasion, that company in which, alas! I used to sin so often. You, my heart, shall be stilled before you love or desire any creature more than God. Here, O Lord! before Thy cross I lay aside all hatred, desire of revenge, and rancor; no matter what injury men have done me, I forgive them from my heart, although they have hitherto been my enemies. Before Thy tomb I lay all unjust gains that I have acquired in any way in the past, and will make due restitution for them; I lay aside, too, all that shame that prevented me from candidly declaring my sins in confession; I will confess them all properly. I no longer wish to live except for Thee, nor to love except Thee alone. O Jesus! by the death Thou didst suffer for love, give and preserve to me and all men till death, and for all eternity, this will, this resolution! Amen.

TENTH SERMON.

ON PILATE, WHO CONDEMNED OUR LORD TO DIE.

Subject.

1, Pilate permitted the sufferings of Christ through culpable negligence; 2, through human respect and the fear of men he consented to His death; 3, he presumptuously authorized His condemnation to the cross. In our days there are many Pilates among Christians who in the same way crucify and put Christ to death.—*Preached on Good Friday.*

Text.

Videns autem Pilatus quia nihil proficeret, . . . accepta aqua, lavit manus coram populo, dicens: Innocens ego sum a sanguine justi hujus.—Matt. xxvii. 24.

“And Pilate seeing that he prevailed nothing, . . . taking water washed his hands before the people, saying: I am innocent of the blood of this just man.”

Introduction.

A queer kind of innocence, Pilate! It is true that he did not himself lay violent hands on the Son of God, nor shed His blood;

others did that, and, indeed, men of all states and conditions conspired together, as it were, to persecute Jesus and contribute their share to His sufferings and death. Annas and Caiphas and the other priests of the synagogue accused and condemned Him; the priests of the New Law, the apostles, His own disciples, betrayed, sold, denied, and abandoned Him. A most vile rabble ridiculed Him and spat at Him; Herod, with his army, mocked Him as a fool; the common people shouted unanimously for His blood; the executioners scourged, crowned Him with thorns, crucified and put Him to death; the scribes and the impenitent thief blasphemed and sneered at Him even as He was hanging on the cross. Pilate did none of those things, and therefore he "washed his hands before the people, saying: I am innocent of the blood of this just man." But this was not enough to free him from guilt. Why? Pilate was the governor of Judea; the high-priests and people could not have glutted their wickedness and cruelty on Christ if Pilate had not given his consent and permission; it lay in his power to free Our Lord from their hands, and he was bound by his duty as judge to prevent their tormenting Him, and to oppose the wrath and fury of His enemies, and thus to free Jesus from death. But he did none of these things. He gave his consent and permission; he actually pronounced the sentence of death, partly through carelessness, partly through fear, and partly through arrogance; therefore he is considered as the person who is chiefly to be blamed for the death of Jesus Christ. There, my dear brethren, you have the subject of this sermon on the passion, which, after all, will accuse not Pilate so much as many of us Christians.

Plan of Discourse.

Pilate permitted the passion of Christ through culpable neglect: the first part. He consented to His death out of human respect and the fear of men: the second part. He condemned Him to the cross through arrogance: the third and longest part. The moral to be drawn from each part, which shall take the longest time to explain, shall show that in our days there are many Pilates among Christians, who thus crucify Christ and put Him to death. The object shall be to excite these latter to see their crime and truly to repent, and through sincere love of Christ to amend their lives.

On Pilate, who Condemned Our Lord to Die. 111

Such, O Jesus Christ, is the end and aim of this sermon! On this great day of our redemption, on which Thou didst shed Thy most holy blood on the gibbet of the cross, and didst die for the conversion of sinners, Thou wilt surely not refuse us Thy powerful grace! We beg this through that same death of Thine, through Thy Mother, who suffered with Thee at the cross, and through the intercession of the angels, who wept with compassion for Thee.

Let us go at once to the hall of Pilate, and see what happens to Our Lord there. "And the soldiers led Him away into the court of the palace, and they call together the whole band." What do they do to Him? "They clothe Him with purple," etc. See how those cruel soldiers throw a torn purple garment over His limbs, after having flogged Him from head to foot with rods, cords, and chains, so that there was not a sound place in His whole body; then they violently press a crown of thorns on His head: "Platting a crown of thorns, they put it upon Him;" instead of a sceptre they put into His hand a worthless reed; they vie with each other in buffeting Him in the face and spitting at Him; they kneel before Him in mockery, and hail Him in derision as a king: "And they began to salute Him: Hail, king of the Jews!"¹ See what a grand king is seated on the throne! What wantonness! What shameful, disgraceful treatment for the Son of the most high and almighty God, at whose name every knee must bend with the utmost reverence in heaven, on earth, and under the earth! O ye heavens! how were you able to see that tragedy enacted on the Son of God without taking immediate vengeance? O earth! how couldst thou bear on thy surface such wicked wretches? And Thou, dearest Saviour, what dost Thou say of it? What were Thy feelings when undergoing that shame and torment? Hast Thou no more fire to send down on the miscreants? Hast Thou no thunder-bolt to shatter them to pieces? Truly Thou wert not wanting in power to avenge Thyself! But Jesus held His peace; He allowed them to do as they pleased, and left Himself in their hands to be mocked and tormented, thus giving Christians an example of the meekness they should display in bearing insults.

How wantonly the Son of God was treated in Pilate's house.

But to come more to my subject: where was all this cruelty practised? In the hall of Pilate. Who ordered it? No one;

Since Pilate through

¹ *Milites autem duxerunt eum in atrium prætorii, et convocant totam cohortem. Imponunt ei plectentes spineam coronam. Et cœperunt salutare eum: Ave, rex Judæorum.—Mark xv. 16-18.*

carelessness
did not
hinder that,
he is guilty
of it.

certainly not Pilate at least. How then could such inhuman torments and insults be inflicted on Our Lord, who was perfectly innocent, in the house of Pilate, and by his own guards and soldiers, if he himself had not ordered and commanded them to that effect? How did the rabble dare to act in that way? They were egged on by the high-priests, and Pilate did not concern himself as to what was done with the Prisoner; he connived at it all. Hence his ministers and attendants could do as they wished. Is there then no blame to be attached to Pilate? He did not issue any command; perhaps he knew nothing about it. "I am innocent," he said. Innocent indeed! You are rather all the more to blame for what happened! As superior and governor of the people, you should have known and seen what was being done, and put a stop to it. No; your excuse is a lame one; you, Pilate, are the very cause of Innocence suffering so cruelly.

In the same
way
masters and
mistresses
are guilty of
the sins of
their do-
mestics.

Christian superiors, masters and mistresses, what a beautiful moral for you! You often think and believe that you are quite free and innocent in conscience; but it may be sometimes that you are stained with the guilt of many sins, if not your own, at least of the sins of others, that like Pilate you participate in by your carelessness and slothfulness. You give to every man his own, you keep the commandments of God, you often visit the churches, pray, confess and receive Holy Communion frequently in the year, as good Christians should do; and that is good and praiseworthy. I am innocent, you think, of the blood of Jesus Christ. But no! that does not at all follow. For, what are those who are under your authority doing in the meantime? In your house, perhaps, the Son of God is not known through culpable ignorance by your servants and domestics. In the morning they never go to church or practise any devotion; hardly do they hear a sermon or get any instruction once in the half year; for months they remain away from confession and Communion. Who is to blame for that? In your house and by your domestics the Son of God is mocked by blasphemies, and curses and imprecations take the place of morning and evening prayer; who is to blame for that? In your house the Son of God is wounded by many sins; servant men and maids keep up illicit intercourse; they spend the evening till a late hour in each other's company at the street door, in the kitchen, in some out-of-the-way corner, and God knows what wickedness goes on between them. Your servant-man keeps up an unlawful intimacy in the neighborhood;

your maid follows his example; and who is now to blame for all these sins? We have not ordered them, you say; and indeed I believe you. It would be too bad altogether for you to command people to do such wicked things. But it is your duty and obligation to see that those things do not occur, and to prevent them. We know nothing about them; we look on our servants as good and pious. If so, why are you masters and mistresses in your house? You could and should know all about it; but you are often not desirous to know; you neglect looking after your domestics, and do not care how they live. As long as they do their work, and are faithful to you, you are satisfied; but they may act towards the Almighty God as they please, for all you care. Wo to you! Hear what St. Paul says about you: "But if any man have not care of his own, and especially of those of his house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel."¹ Let him be otherwise as pious and holy as he pleases. Heathens and idolaters do not allow any one to insult their false gods; they oblige their domestics to worship and honor them. If you then allow anything contrary to Christ, to His law and doctrine, or do not prevent wrong-doing through carelessness on your own part, you have neither true faith in God nor true love for the Son of God; and before His tribunal you will be held guilty of all the sins your domestics thus commit.

Christian parents, of all other superiors you especially should take this to yourselves, and see that you bring up your children for their last end, in the fear and love of God alone, and for eternal happiness. Alas, the pity of it! How many Pilates there are in this way among Christians, who yet like Pilate try to wash their hands and to make themselves out innocent! Ah, how shamefully Christ is treated in and out of the house by the children of those parents! The sons and daughters are taught how to read and write, to fence and ride, to sing and play, to dance and caper, to dress and adorn themselves, to behave well in company: do the fathers and mothers know of this? Of course they do! That is their greatest care and trouble; that is a matter in which they allow no fault or failing; question after question they ask about it; for that purpose they send their children away to foreign lands, that they may be well instructed. But are the children also taught in the school of Jesus Christ how to live well, to seek the king-

And parents
of the sins
of their
children.

¹ S' quis autem suorum, et maxime domesticorum curam non habet, fidem negavit, et est infidelis deterior.—I. Tim. v. 8.

dom of God and His justice before all other things, to keep their consciences free from sin, to adorn their souls with virtues, to please God daily more and more? And do the fathers and mothers know of this? Oh, that is taken for granted; it is supposed to be as it should be! Sons and daughters go about dressed up extravagantly, or idle away their time at home; they stand at the windows, at the door, on the street, to let themselves be seen; they frequent mixed company in parties, walks, and nightly gatherings, and play and dance with any one that comes. Do the fathers and mothers know of this? But what am I asking? Of course they do; they see it with pleasure; they even command their children to act in that way; they bring them to those parties, for they wish them to learn how to live after the manner of the world, and are afraid lest they should become too holy and religiously inclined. But do the children attend devotions regularly in church? Oh, yes! especially in the dark night, that they may not excite remark as they go home arm in arm with the companions whose acquaintance they have made in the nightly gatherings they attend. Eh! how the devil must grieve at the sight of devotions of this kind! And are they diligent in hearing sermons, in listening to the word of God, that they may be aroused to serve God more zealously, to hate sin, to despise the world and its vanities, to practise Christian humility and modesty, to avoid the occasions and dangers of sin, to mortify the outward senses in the rugged way of the cross, the only way that leads to heaven? And do the fathers and mothers know whether or not their children attend sermons? Oh, this is left to themselves; they may go if they wish to get up early enough in the morning! Meanwhile how shamefully Christ is tortured by such a mode of life! And what a multitude of sins are committed! I can hardly bear to think of what happened in the last war! Wo to those parents in the judgment who allow their daughters too much liberty, unless they sincerely repent! O innocent youth, how thou art betrayed! Alas, it will take a long time for those unhappy young people to unlearn the vices they have become accustomed to! I will confine myself to the present time. How much sin is committed on those occasions by impure thoughts, imaginations, desires, allurements, caressing words, touches, actions in and out of the parents' houses? Do the fathers and mothers know of it? God forbid! We hope not; we know nothing of it! Here we can wash our hands: "I am innocent." We are not to blame in this

respect! Ah, wait! you will see later on whether you will not have to pay for all these sins of your children on that great day. Christian parents! I have often reminded you with the best possible intentions in your regard, and do not forget what I again say to you: to be lost forever no sin of your own is required; if you wish to go to hell, only continue to bring up your children as many do nowadays, and you will find it the surest means of going to hell with your children and your children's children.

But what is the good of preaching to them? They will not be influenced by it in the least! They are like Pilate when he was actually sitting in judgment. "His wife," says the Scripture, "sent to him, saying: Have thou nothing to do with that just man; for I have suffered many things this day in a dream because of Him."¹ What effect had this message on Pilate? We do not read in the gospel that he made any answer whatever, from which we may conclude that he looked on his wife's warning as an empty dream, and not worth noticing. Such is the way in which many people act nowadays; preachers, confessors, and other priests, zealous for the salvation of souls, warn, beseech, and entreat them with the apostle St. Paul: Parents! bring up your children in the fear and love of God; look carefully after them, that they may go to heaven for all eternity, etc. But when once the teaching and vanity and folly of the perverse world have weakened faith, all these exhortations and warnings are disregarded like the idle dreams of a nervous woman, as mere phantoms of the night. Others do so: such is the excuse; it is the fashion; young people must enjoy themselves; it is foolish to find fault with such customs, etc. Such too are the thoughts of those who happen to hear something in a sermon that does not suit them, who are reminded of their duty in a matter in which they do not wish to change their present wrong mode of action. Oh, they exclaim, it is only the talk of priests; we have often heard it before; no one takes any notice of such things; it seems as if there were nothing else to preach about. And if they happen to find a priest or confessor who passes lightly over such things, or if they themselves imagine there is nothing wrong in their conduct, then they go on boldly, and laugh and make fun of the truths of faith.

Ah, dear Christians, I sincerely hope that you will never have to learn by your own experience, when it is too late, how the

But they despise all exhortations on this head.

And must expect to be

¹ *Mist ad eum uxor ejus, dicens: Nihil tibi et justo illi; multa enim passa sum hodie per visum propter eum.—Matt. xxvii. 19.*

severely
punished.
Shown by an
example.

wicked will acknowledge their mistake hereafter. Truly, they will say, the preachers were right; would that we had followed their advice! Fools that we are! "Therefore we have erred,"¹ and our error is everlasting! Hear what happened last year, as we read in the Annals of our province. A certain man who had six children was often warned by his pastor to look after their eternal welfare, for he had allowed them to go with their mother, who was a Lutheran, to the Lutheran church. But his only answer to these exhortations of the priest was: I must do it, or else I shall have no peace at home with my wife. Go then, said the priest; God will one day demand the blood of your children at your hands, nor will it be long before you will know that by experience. And the prophecy was accomplished. Twelve days after, as the unhappy father was sitting at table, hale and healthy, with his wife and family, he suddenly fell to the ground dead, without giving the least sign of repentance. Let parents take this warning to heart, and if, after examining themselves carefully, they find they have been remiss in this point, let them humbly acknowledge their fault in the stillness of their hearts at the feet of the crucified Jesus, and ask for pardon. Meanwhile I return to Pilate. We have seen how the innocent Jesus had to suffer in his house from the soldiers, and how Pilate could have prevented that suffering, but through his own fault neglected to do so. Let us now briefly consider how he acted towards Our Lord when actually seated on his tribunal, and how through human respect and the fear of men he consented to Our Lord's death; this we shall see in the

Second Part.

Through
human re-
spect Pilate
consented
to the death
of Christ,
although he
knew Him
to be
innocent.

The Holy Scripture goes on to say: "And Jesus stood before the governor."² He heard the accusations that were brought forward against Our Lord by the high-priests and elders of the people, and knew, at the same time, that they were not true, but were dictated solely by envy and hatred: "For he knew that the chief priests had delivered Him up out of envy."³ He questioned the Accused, and was greatly amazed at the Saviour's meek silence. And at last he had to say openly: "I find no cause in Him."⁴ So far Pilate had acted as a just judge. But did he

¹ Ergo erravimus.—Wis. v. 6.

² Jesus autem stetit ante præsidem.—Matt. xvii. 11.

³ Sciebat enim quod per invidiam tradidissent eum summi sacerdotes.—Mark xv. 10.

⁴ Ego nullam invento in eo causam.—John xviii. 38.

continue that mode of action? He does not indeed wish to condemn to death the Son of God, because he knows Him to be innocent; yet he offers the choice to the furious Jews: "Whom will you that I release to you: Barabbas or Jesus?"¹ Barabbas the murderer or the innocent Jesus? When the choice was made contrary to his wish, and the Jews demanded Barabbas, he asked these bitter enemies: "What shall I do then with Jesus?"² He tried every way of escape, and would willingly have freed the Innocent; but all his efforts were frustrated by the howling of the bloodthirsty rabble. To get rid, then, of the whole matter, he left the decision to them: "Take Him you, and judge Him according to your law."³ Finally he gave Jesus into their hands that they might do with Him as they pleased: "Jesus he delivered up to their will."⁴ Unjust judge! The accusers acknowledge that they have not the power, without your consent and approval, to condemn any one to death: "It is not lawful for us to put any man to death."⁵ You know their hatred, envy, and falsehood; you declare Christ to be innocent, and yet you give His wicked enemies the choice of putting Him to death or allowing Him to live; nay, you permit them to pronounce sentence on Him; you give Him completely into their hands. So that you are the author of all the cruelty that Innocence had to suffer. And what induced you to take such a step in spite of your better knowledge? What? Hear by whom, in what manner, and with what threats the accusation was brought forward against Our Lord. The accusers are the high-priests: "And the chief priests accused Him in many things."⁶ The tumult among the crowd increases: "And Pilate seeing that he prevailed nothing, but that rather a tumult was made."⁷ He was even threatened with the displeasure of the emperor: "If thou release this man, thou art not Cæsar's friend."⁸ What was to be done? The accusations come from the most respectable of the people, the crowd support them, and must I risk losing the emperor's friendship for the sake of an unpopular man? "Thou art not Cæsar's friend." Shall I then cease to be a friend to the

¹ Quem vultis dimittam vobis: Barabbam, an Jesum?—Matt. xxvii. 17.

² Quid faciam de Jesu?—Ibid. 22.

³ Accipite eum vos, et secundum legem vestram iudicate eum.—John xviii. 31.

⁴ Jesum vero tradidit voluntati eorum.—Luke xxiii. 25.

⁵ Nobis non licet interficere quemquam.—John xviii. 31.

⁶ Accusabant eum summi sacerdotes in multis.—Mark xv. 3.

⁷ Videns autem Pilatus quia nihil proficeret, sed magis tumultus fieret.—Matt. xxvii. 24.

⁸ Si hunc dimittis, non es amicus Cæsaris.—John xix. 12.

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emperor?• Rather than that, let Christ be abandoned to the rage of His enemies, although He is just and innocent. But they will crucify, they will murder Him? No matter; I must keep the emperor's favor at all costs; I cannot afford to lose his friendship.

In the same way in our day much good is omitted and evil done through human respect.

See, my dear brethren, what injustice is caused by that damnable human respect and fear of men. Examine yourselves now to see whether, perhaps, your virtue too has not often suffered shipwreck on this rock, you thus again condemning Jesus to death. For how do men act nowadays in the world? How many there are who would willingly lead a true Christian, devout, modest, chaste, humble, and righteous life, because they know that this is the sole end of their being, were it not that men and their usages and customs stand in the way. How many, whom no assault of temptation can bring to a fall, yet follow the impious example of Pilate, and allow themselves to be influenced by the same words: "If thou release this man, thou art not Cæsar's friend." If I do this, if I omit that, I cease to be a friend of this or that person! If I live as a Christian should, and according to the teaching and example of Jesus, I shall act contrary to the usual custom of men. If I prefer devotion and the service of God to the society of my equals, I know that I should do right, but what will people say? They will perhaps look on me as a hypocrite. If I appear modest, reserved, and humble in my dress and deportment, I know well that I shall follow the instructions given by St. Paul to all Christians in the infallible word of God; but what will people think of me? I should be out of the fashion; they would laugh at me as a simpleton, as a nun, as one who does not know how to live. If I seek no revenge for this insult, meet my enemy with meekness, and return good for evil, I know well that I should only do what is required by the law of Christ; but what will people think? They will ridicule me as a coward for going against the custom of the world. If I keep my children at home, dress them modestly, and do not allow them to spend their time in a round of visiting, as others do, I know well that it would be better for their salvation; but what will people say? They will cry out on me as clownish, ill-bred, and miserly. If in company where the character of my neighbor is freely commented on, or unchaste conversation indulged in, I do not join in the talk or the laugh, but show my displeasure by my silence and downcast eyes, as I am bound to do by the law of God, what will people

say? They will be angry with me. If I refuse something my conscience will not allow me to grant to the caresses and entreaties of those who love me, I know well I should prefer God to them; but if I do so, I shall lose their affection. If I shun the dangerous or sinful intimacy I have begun, and change my life for the better, what will people say? They will think strange things of me. If I always do my duty according to the requirements of my state and conscientiously, and always speak, am silent, refuse, grant, advise, contradict, allot according to equity and justice—all honorable Christians should do so, as I well know; but then I should offend the rich and powerful; this or that person from whom I have something to fear or hope for will look askance at me. In a word, if in all circumstances I take into consideration the honor of God and the salvation of my soul, I shall be no friend to the world. If then one of the two has to be chosen, I will renounce virtue and the Christian life, in order to be like the majority of men; and so let innocence yield to guilt, poverty to wealth, right to wrong, dissipation to continence, the gospel to the law of the perverse world, the service of God to the service of men, that I may remain the friend of men! What! exclaims my conscience, is it thus you again crucify Jesus your Saviour? I cannot help it; let Him hang on the cross, provided only I retain the friendship of men. But you will lose your soul and go to hell? No matter; let me go to hell, if only I can please men and accommodate myself to the customs of the world.

Hear, O suffering Lord, how unjustly and shamefully we Christians act towards Our Saviour, when we frequently, through human respect and the fear of men, omit good and do evil, as unfortunately is the case with only too many of all states and conditions! Thou didst prefer us to all the goods of heaven and earth, when Thou didst leave heaven for our sake and come down on earth to live in bitter poverty; Thou didst prefer us and our advantage to all Thou Thyself didst possess; to Thy head, which for us was crowned with thorns; to Thy eyes, which ran with blood; to Thy ears, which were offended with mockery and insult; to Thy taste, which was mortified by the vinegar and gall; to Thy hands and feet, which were pierced with the nails; to Thy whole body, which was so cruelly mangled; to Thy blood, which Thou didst shed even to the last drop; to Thy honor and good name, when Thou wert hung on the gibbet like a thief; to Thy soul, which was sorrowful even to death; to Thy life and spirit, which

What heinous ingratitude towards Our Saviour!

Thou didst give up for us on the cross. So that Thou hast loved us more than Thyself, and we inhuman monsters esteem Thee, our sovereign and only Good, lower often than a worm of earth, a mortal creature, whose favor we value more than Thy friendship, whose enmity we fear more than Thine; we turn our backs on Thee and give Thee over to the executioners that Thou mayest be crucified, in order that we may please men! Alas, O Jesus! I acknowledge that I with many others have donethis!

Sorrow and purpose of amendment.

O foolish, ungrateful mortal that I am! whither have I been brought by this vain love and fear and human respect? I am sorry for it a thousand times, O loving Lord, and here before Thy cross I execrate and repent of my wickedness! Henceforward I will honor Thee more, nor shall I allow myself to be withdrawn a hair's breadth from Thy true love and service by any man in the world, no matter how high or great or useful or dear to me he may be. Other men may do, think, say, ridicule, sneer, threaten, despise as they will; for my part I will do, act, and refrain from acting, speak and live according to Thy good will and pleasure, O my God and Saviour! If I am but Thy friend, I am fortunate enough; I can be Thy friend if I only honestly love Thee; therefore from the bottom of my heart I will love Thee above all things to my latest breath, that I may be and remain Thy friend in eternity. Amen.

You may continue, my dear brethren, making similar acts of contrition and charity; and meanwhile, to give you an opportunity of resting your minds a little and myself a few moments' respite from the labor of speaking, a hymn suitable to the passion-tide will be sung.

Third Part.

“ And Pilate seeing that he prevailed nothing, . . . taking water, washed his hands before the people, saying: I am innocent of the blood of this just man.”

Through an arrogated authority Pilate condemns Christ to death: hence he is the chief murderer of the Lord.

How, Pilate? Do you still dare to pose as an innocent man? The immaculate Jesus has suffered so much shame and torture in your very house; you have permitted that, although you could have prevented it, as you were bound to do; so that your culpable neglect makes you guilty of the blood that has been shed. Moreover, through human respect and the fear of men, you consented to His death, when the fear of displeasing the high-priests and the emperor induced you to deliver Him up to the rage of His en-

emies, as I have already shown. But in addition to all this, you as supreme governor and judge, in order to make an arrogant display of your power, pronounced the sentence that condemned the Innocent to the death of the cross. Out of your own mouth, by your own words, I convict you, and prove the truth of my accusation. Hear, my dear brethren, the sequel of the sacred history. After the timorous judge had vacillated for a time between the known innocence of Our Lord, and his own views and desires, he at last pronounced sentence on Christ. "And Pilate gave sentence that it should be as they required."¹ What had the Jews required? "Crucify Him! crucify Him!"² Yes, said the judge; what you wish shall be done. "And he released unto them him who for murder and sedition had been cast into prison, whom they had desired, but Jesus he delivered up to their will."³ So that by thus passing sentence, Pilate actually commanded that Jesus should be nailed to the cross. But how could he make up his mind to utter such a command? Through his imagining that he possessed the power of doing so. "Knowest thou not," he said to Our Lord, "that I have power to crucify Thee, and I have power to release Thee?"⁴ St. Ambrose rebukes Pilate for this mistake: "Your own words, Pilate, prove you guilty; the sentence pronounced by you convicts you of acting, not according to equity, but according to power."⁵ You have freed the murderer, and murdered the Author of life, acting in both cases according to the power you have arrogated. If I had been present when you addressed the question to Our Lord: "Knowest Thou not that I have power to crucify Thee?" no, Pilate, I should have answered; you have not that power. As judge you can indeed pronounce sentence; but your sentence must be according to justice, and not otherwise. You can condemn to death, but only one who has deserved death by his crimes, and not an innocent man. Meanwhile he "gave sentence that it should be as they required;" right or wrong, he said that they might have their will and desire. What followed thereon? The sentence was at once carried into execution; the heavy cross was laid on the shoulders of the Lord;

¹ Et Pilatus adjudicavit fieri petitionem eorum.—Luke xxiii. 24.

² Crucifige, crucifige eum!—Ibid. 21.

³ Dimisit autem illis eum qui propter homicidium et seditionem missus fuerat in carcerem, quem petebant: Jesum vero tradidit voluntati eorum.—Ibid. 25.

⁴ Necis quia potestatem habeo crucifigere te, et potestatem habeo dimittere te?—John xix. 10.

⁵ Tua voce constringeris, tua sententia damnaris; pro potestate igitur, non pro æquitate crucifigendum Dominum tradidisti.—S. Amb. Sermon. 20, in Ps. 118.

they dragged Him to the place of execution on Mount Calvary, tore the clothes off His wounded body with the utmost violence, reopening all His wounds, threw Him down on the shameful cross, seized the hammer and nails, and fastened Him to the cross by the hands and feet, and there He hung for three hours amid the sneers and blasphemies of the Jews, a mockery to the whole world, in the utmost pain, until bowing down His head He gave up the ghost. See now, Pilate, what you have done by the power you arrogated to yourself! You are the chief murderer of the Son of God! By the sentence you pronounced you have crucified and murdered Jesus!

Sinners too
have the
power to
crucify
Christ.

But to no purpose do I lose time addressing Pilate; for, if he is among the reprobate in hell, he cannot be moved to repent and atone for his crime. Come here then, all you sinners! consider Jesus hanging this day on the cross, and see yourselves in the person of Pilate. See what you have done with Pilate to Our Lord, by the same arrogated power: "Crucifying again to themselves the Son of God." Such are the well-known words of the great St. Paul, the apostle of the Gentiles; all those who consent to a grievous sin again crucify the Son of God. Therefore as often as you have committed any mortal sin whatever, you have nailed Christ to the cross and put Him to death. What do you think of this? Are your hearts not yet softened to repentance for your cruelty? Christians! is it possible that there are any here present so hardened in heart and will that they are determined to continue in the state of sin without repenting, or to commit new sins? If so, then I beseech them, and all Christians who are assembled here, especially when they are tempted to sin, to take a crucifix in their hand, or else lay it before them on their knees, and thus say with Pilate: "Knowest Thou not that I have power to crucify Thee, and I have power to release Thee?" Christ Jesus, knowest Thou not that I can now crucify Thee again? Now I have Thee in my power; if I will, I can crucify Thee by my pride or vanity; I can crucify Thee by taking or keeping unjustly what belongs to another; I can crucify Thee by indulging in impure thoughts and desires, by unchaste looks, by impure songs, by reading loose love stories and romances, by unlawful touches and actions, by gratifying my passions with this or that person; I can crucify Thee, if I will, by cursing, swearing, speaking ill of my neighbor; I can crucify

¹ Crucifigentes sibi metipsum Filium Dei.—Heb. vi. 6.

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Thee by gluttony and drunkenness; I can crucify Thee by neglecting the duties of my state. "Knowest Thou not that I have power?" Christ Jesus! hearest Thou this? Dost Thou not know that I can thus crucify Thee anew? Yes, I acknowledge it; such is the answer Our Lord makes you with head bowed down. Yes, you have that power, because My heavenly Father has given you freedom for good or evil. I am in your hands; it is for you either to free Me from the extreme torment caused Me by the frustration of My passion, and that you can do by the help of My grace, by the good use of your free will, that is, by true repentance for your sins, and by guarding carefully against future sin; or else by misusing your freedom, that is, by impenitence, or by adding to your guilt, to renew all My sufferings, and to crucify Me again. If you choose the former, then I will receive you with the outstretched arms of My mercy, press you to My heart, ready to forget all the insults you have offered Me, and I will give you the merits of My blood to obtain your pardon, and to enable you to persevere in My love. But if you choose the latter to your own eternal damnation and to the renewing of My torments, then I must allow you to have your way; I am in your hands.

Christians, the Son of God is in your power! Say now here, at once, what you mean to do. Come, what is your decision? Do you say: I will not repent yet; there is time enough for me to amend my life: I will not yet give up sin? Let me then ask with Pilate: "What shall I then do with Jesus?" Crucify Him! To the gibbet with Him! Ah, Christians! do not make such a hard-hearted resolution! For God's sake reflect a little on what you are doing! Hear what Homer writes of two great heroes, Diomede and Glaucus; they had challenged each other to a duel; neither knew the other, for they both had their faces hidden by their visors; thus they ran blindly on each other, eager to glut their fury. In the midst of the combat Diomede cried out: I am fighting, and I know not with whom; take off your helmet, perhaps I may kill a man whose death I shall bitterly deplore ever after. They both uncovered their faces, and behold Diomede saw in his opponent Glaucus, one who had entertained him most hospitably a short time before. Ah, he exclaimed, throwing away his lance, my dearest friend and host! have I really tried to kill you? Is it possible that I should try to take away my benefactor's life? No! Heaven save me from such ingratitude! They then embraced each other heartily.

Before resolving to do so, they should consider whom they crucify by sin. Shown by an example.

For they
crucify our
supreme
Benefactor
and best
Friend.

Sinner, you are about to crucify Jesus anew. Ah, wait a little! See first whom you are minded to slay. Open the eyes of faith; do you not yet know who He is? "Behold the Man!" I say again, with Pilate: behold your Saviour, your Redeemer, your sovereign God! Do you wish to attack Him? Behold the Man from whom you have received everything good that you possess! Will you nail Him again to the cross? Behold the Man who created you when you were nothing; who has since preserved you every moment by His omnipotence, even while you were in the state of sin, and kept you from falling into hell. Will you slay Him? Behold the Man, your most liberal Host, who gives you His own flesh and blood as your food and drink; who loves you more than Himself, more than His own life; who has loved you to death, even to the death of the cross; who by His death has opened for you the gates of heaven, where He has prepared for you indescribable joys! Will you nail Him again to the cross? I beg of you, if you should ever come to such a mad determination, take the crucifix at once in your hands; its lifeless tongue will speak to you as Joseph formerly did to his brothers, and say: "I am Jesus your Brother, whom you crucified." I am Jesus, who for you, and often afterwards by you, was nailed to the cross. Must I again suffer death at your hands? Great as was the rage and hatred of the brethren of Joseph, and their determination to put him out of the way, yet they were restrained by the words of Judas: "What will it profit us to kill our brother, and conceal his blood? for he is our brother and our flesh."¹ Ask yourself seriously, before you make up your mind to sin: What will it profit us? What good will it be to you to slay Jesus? For He is your loving Brother, who has often successfully interceded with His heavenly Father in your favor.

And that
too after
He died for
us on the
cross.
Hence he is
a cruel man
who deter-
mines to
sin
grievously.

Say again what is your determination? Crucify Him! No matter what He is, Friend or Foe, Benefactor or Enemy, Brother or Stranger, to the cross, to the gallows with Him! We will not give up sin for His sake. But listen for a moment; where and in what circumstances are you minded to crucify Jesus anew? When He is actually hanging dead for you on the cross, and has shed every drop of His blood for your sake? After He has been so often slain by you already? O cruel barbarians! where are ye? We read in history that Cato wept at the sight of the blood of the

¹ Quid nobis prodest, si occiderimus fratrem nostrum, et celaverimus sanguinem ipsius? Frater enim et caro nostra est.

citizens that was shed by him during the civil wars in Rome; that Titus shed tears on considering the slaughter of the Jewish people that took place at the siege of Jerusalem; that Alexander was overcome at the sight of the dead body of Darius; nay, that he even covered it with his own purple mantle, although he was convinced that he could not satisfy his desire for victory unless by the death of this enemy of his. How do you act, O sinner! at the sight and consideration of the blood that was shed for you, of the Saviour who was so lamentably put to death? You still continue to sin without shedding a single tear of repentance, to rage against Him who is already dead, and to cry out: Crucify Him! Hang Him on the cross again! To the gibbet again with Him! so that you are more cruel than the bloodthirsty heathens themselves? I remember having once read that St. Francis Xavier, having failed by all his threats, prayers, and exhortations to induce a certain slave to renounce the vice of impurity, led him into a neighboring thicket, and there baring his own back, scourged himself severely, saying: Xavier will not cease kneeling here, and scourging himself, until you make up your mind to change your sinful life, and repent. The slave, savage though he was, was forced to yield; he threw himself down at Xavier's feet, mingled his tears with the saint's blood, and promised amendment, execrating the vices he had been addicted to. Sinner, we are standing before the cross of Jesus Christ. There I can show you the blood, not of a holy and innocent Xavier, but of divine innocence and holiness, which flowed from the wounds of the dying Saviour. By shedding a few drops of his blood Xavier won to repentance an untamed heart sunk in the depths of impurity; and shall Christ Jesus, whom Xavier preached to the heathen, and who shed His blood to the last drop, not be able to effect as much with Christians? nay, must the shedding of His blood make them only more enraged against Him, so that they continue to cry out: Crucify Him! let Him be nailed again to the cross?

Truly there is little use in preaching. Crucify Him! To the cross with Him! Such will be the cry of most people after Easter, when the former temptations come back, the former occasions again present themselves, the former companions again exercise their powers of seduction, the former usages of the perverse world again assert their tyranny. To the cross with Jesus! The old course is again entered on, the old usury and injustice, the old impure love, the old unchaste habits, the old gluttony and

Yet Christ
is crucified
by most
people.
But wo to
them!

drunkenness, the old hatred and desire of revenge, the old habit of swearing and cursing, the old dancing and capering and caressing in nightly gatherings. Crucify Him! To the cross with Jesus! He is again in our power! Ah, wicked Christians! such will be your conduct; but wo to you! and wo forever to you! The time will come when this very Son of God, whom you now so impiously crucify, will come as judge of the living and the dead; then things shall be changed; then the question shall be asked: Pilate, where art thou? There are so many Pilates among My Christians; where are they? Come here before My tribunal. Do you remember how you treated Me? I was then in your hands, and you could use your free will and power against Me; but now My turn has come. Now I have you in the hands of My implacable justice, from which no power nor might can save you. Now I need not spend much time in asking you: Know you not that I have power to condemn you to hell, or not? You will find out that. This very blood shed for and by you, these open wounds, so often renewed by you, this cross, on which you have so often nailed Me, all call out the irrevocable sentence against you: Depart from Me you cursed! Away with you into everlasting fire!

The meditation of the sufferings of Christ should induce them to repent, like other sinners.

Christ Jesus! ah, let not this be verified with any of those who are here now. Rather show us now the almighty power of the precious blood Thou hast shed, and the death Thou hast suffered in softening the hardened hearts of those who do not think of repenting! Thou canst still do what Thou hast often done, and change the most obdurate hearts by the voice of Thy preachers. In conclusion, hear, my dear brethren, not me, but another preacher, Father Benedict Palmius, as we read in the Annals of our Society. As he was once preaching the seven hours at Messina, in Sicily, on Good Friday, the following wonderful conversion occurred. A nobleman named Ansalonius, who for seventeen years had disturbed the whole city of Messina by broils and factions, was determined to revenge the death of his brother, whom a certain citizen had slain; he had already brought matters so far as to have secured the person of the guilty man with the intention of putting him to death after Easter. Father Palmius, following the Italian custom, drew aside, during the sermon on the passion, the veil that covered the crucifix, but, driven by an irresistible impulse, covered it again, ordered all the lights and candles in the church to be extinguished, and then inflamed with a holy

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zeal against sinners, began to thunder forth against them, and to cry out: Go, ye wretches; away with you! you are not worthy to behold your Redeemer, whom you have nailed to the cross by your scandalous lives! Nor will I allow you to see Him until you all publicly promise me that you will never more offend Him, that you will do sincere penance and steadfastly amend your lives. When he saw that this exhortation produced no effect, and that the hearts of his hearers were not moved, he turned to the crucifix: No, O Lord! no, he cried out; do not show them Thy divine countenance! The most of those who are here only mock Thee; they do not care for the blood Thou hast shed for them, the unheard-of love Thou hast shown them; they honor Thee only with the mouth and the lips, but their hearts are given to the perverse world, and to mortal creatures; they are resolved to persist in the miserable state in which they now are, and refuse to promise me to serve and love Thee truly in future. These and similar words made such an impression on the hearts of the people, that they all began to shed copious tears, and to cry out with one voice: Uncover! show to us Our Saviour! We are all ready and willing to do and adhere to whatever you will say to us. Ansalonius, who had remained at a distance behind the others, now forced his way to the pulpit, and cried out as loud as he could: Father, father, I surrender! Do with me as you will! The preacher heard the words, but knew not from whom they came; and, therefore, he asked: Who are you? I am Ansalonius, answered the nobleman, who have given such scandal for so many years to the whole city by my vindictiveness; I am now lying at your feet, nor will I depart until I have publicly forgiven my enemy. The prisoner who was awaiting death was then brought forth into the church; Ansalonius embraced him with tears in his eyes, protested publicly before a notary and all present as witnesses, that he forgave him with all his heart, and dismissed him free. This wonderful conversion caused universal astonishment, and, at the same time, the utmost joy in the whole city, and it produced, moreover, a heroic resolution that Ansalonius then and there made; for from that moment he left the world and its vanities, and became a poor Capuchin monk.

Christ Jesus, I turn to Thee and ask: Has, then, the death Thou hast suffered, and the blood Thou hast shed, no longer the **same power over the hearts of men?** Thou Thyself hast promised: **“I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all things to My-**

Contrition
for past
sins.

self.”¹ Ah, dear Saviour! keep Thy word, and draw to Thyself as it were by force, my heart and the hearts of all present, that today, at least in the stillness of our hearts, we may all say, filled with contrition like that nobleman: I surrender, O Jesus! I declare myself ready and willing to do and to omit all Thou wilt! Are you in earnest about this, dear Christians? If there be any among you who is not sincere, let him leave the church and not disturb by his obstinacy, the good desires of the others, who now lay the resolutions they have made at the feet of their crucified Saviour. Behold, then, O dying Jesus! prostrated before Thee, they who now publicly and candidly confess their sins, and who bewail nothing more than that they have so often crucified and put Thee to death anew by their manifold crimes! Yes, I am sorry! (so should each one say to himself) I am a thousand times sorry with my whole heart for having ever treated Thee so shamefully! Pardon, pardon me, O meekest Saviour! Once more do I beg Thee to have mercy on me! In eternity I shall never offend Thee again! Rather will I lose all in the world rather die than ever again, for any cause whatever, consent to sin against Thee, my dearest Saviour!

And purpose to do the will of the Crucified in all things in future.

Here Thou hast me body and soul; do with me what and how Thou wilt! Command and counsel what and how Thou wilt should be my course of life in future. Dost Thou wish me to confess candidly all my sins in the tribunal of confession? This very day I shall do it. And those sins, too, that I have hitherto hidden or not properly confessed through shame, shall also be put off my conscience. Dost Thou wish me, according to Thy doctrine and example, to behave, inwardly and outwardly, as Christian modesty and humility require? Yes, O Lord, I am ready, and I now condemn and reject all that could flatter my pride, vanity, or dissipated spirit. Dost Thou wish me to restore all that I have unjustly taken from the character or property of my neighbor? I am ready to do so, and it shall be done at once. Dost Thou wish me to lead a pure and chaste life; and to that end, that I should give up the acquaintance of that person, keep away from that company, avoid that house, that occasion forever, and keep a guard on my senses? Behold, O my God, I surrender at last; for Thy sake I now renounce all unlawful love; never more shall I set foot in that house in which I have hitherto found the proximate occasion of sin; never more shall I lay eyes on that person

¹ Ego, si exaltatus fuero a terra, omnia traham ad meipsum.—John xii. 32.

with whom I have sinned so often; never more shall I speak a single word to, or trust myself in the presence of those wicked companions. Dost Thou wish me to lay aside that secret hatred and anger against that man, and to be reconciled with him? Even for this I am prepared; I now pardon him from my heart; and I will be the first to offer him my sincere friendship this very day. Dost Thou wish me to give up the scandalous habit of swearing and cursing? Yes, O Lord! with Thy help and grace, never more shall an imprecation fall from my lips with my full knowledge and consent; and if ever the old bad habit should make me forget myself, I will do true penance. Dost Thou wish me to live more temperately, and to shun the wretched drunkenness that has hitherto led me into so much sin? Yes, for that, too, I am ready. Dost Thou wish me to change the idle life I am leading, to avoid useless conversations and amusements, to take more care of my servants and children, and to bring them up in Thy love and service, to rise earlier in the morning, to spend more time in devotion, to be more diligent in hearing sermons and receiving the sacraments, and more patient in bearing the crosses Thou wilt send me? Behold, O Jesus! I am ready for all this. From this moment I will begin to lead a new life, to love Thee alone, to love Thee constantly above everything in the world, to love Thee, who hast loved me even to the death of the cross. This is the promise I now make here before Thy cross, before Mary Thy Mother and mine, before my holy guardian angel and all the saints as so many witnesses.

Hear, O dearest Lord! the beautiful resolutions now made by Thy penitent Christians. Ah, strengthen them, I beseech Thee, by Thy holy blessing and powerful grace, that they may be fulfilled! Kneel down, dear Christians! Jesus will give you His blessing, and I, too, will give it you in His name: *Benedictio Domini nostri Jesu Christi descendat super nos!*—"May the blessing of the Lord Jesus come down upon us all!" And may the power of the precious blood He has shed for us, and the bitter death He has suffered for us on the cross, confirm and effect in us what His light and grace have begun to work in us, that we may persevere constantly in His love till death! To that end I bless you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

ELEVENTH SERMON.

**ON THOSE WHO ARE GUILTY OF SHEDDING THE
BLOOD OF CHRIST.**

Subject.

Who are guilty of the blood of Christ? 1. In heaven; 2. On earth.—*Preached on Good Friday.*

Text.

Accepta aqua, lavit manus coram populo, dicens : Innocens ego sum a sanguine justi hujus : vos videritis.—Matt. xxvii. 24.

“ Pilate taking water, washed his hands before the people, saying: I am innocent of the blood of this just man; look you to it.”

Introduction.

When Mark Antony was holding the funeral oration over the body of the murdered Cæsar, he caused the bleeding remains to be elevated on a lofty stage before the people, and cried out in a mournful voice: “ Alas! alas! for those grey hairs of thine that are now so foully stained with blood!”¹ These few words and the sight of the blood-stained corpse worked so powerfully on the citizens, that it filled them, first with pity, and then with such rage that they ran, at once, to cut to pieces those who had committed the foul murder. My dear brethren, the Catholic Church to-day places before the eyes of all her children a far more sorrowful spectacle, a far more terrible one, when she points to the bleeding and mangled body of Our Lord and Emperor, Jesus Christ, the Son of God, hanging on the cross on Calvary, pierced to death, wounded in every part, and streaming with blood; and this she asks us to contemplate, saying to us the sorrowful words: “ Behold the wood of the cross on which did hang the salvation of the world,”² on which Christ shed His blood. Christians, where are our hearts? Are they made of stone? But even then the consideration of the tragic death of our God should rend them in pieces, as the rocks were rent at the time of His death! Are they of flesh? How is it then possible for them not to be moved by a sincere pity for the Saviour thus

¹ *Hæu mihi canos tuos sanguine foedatos!*

² *Ecce lignum crucis, in quo salus mundi pependit.*

bathed in His blood, and by a holy zeal, anger, and rage against the bloodhounds who ruthlessly shed that innocent blood? But who are they who are guilty of it? My object to-day is to seek them out, and, when I have found them, to pronounce sentence on them in the name of God. Who then, I ask publicly, is guilty of shedding the blood of Jesus Christ? Pilate shrugs his shoulders and pretends to know nothing of it: "And Pilate, seeing that he prevailed nothing, but that rather a tumult was made," finding that all his plans and suggestions had no effect on the maddened crowd, but rather added to their fury, "taking water washed his hands before the people, saying: I am innocent of the blood of this just Man, look you to it;" see whether you will take the responsibility of it. I will now, on this great day of tragedy and judgment, examine whether or not this excuse and self-defence of Pilate be valid; but I shall not confine myself to him alone, for I intend to go further, and not cease from the examination till I have found those who are most to blame. And, that my search may be successful, I will go through heaven and earth, and examine even those who could remotely have some blame attached to them.

Plan of Discourse.

It is indeed a terrible thing to be guilty of the blood of Christ! Such is the foundation of my sermon. Who is guilty of it in heaven? This I will examine in the first part. Who is guilty and most guilty of it on earth? This we shall see in the second part. Wo to him who shall be found guilty, unless he satisfies the divine justice! But well, indeed, is it for him who, in due time, acknowledges his guilt, and repents of it humbly and sincerely! Such shall be the conclusion.

Sinners, be comforted, and at the same time terrified! Pious Christians, continue to love your bleeding Saviour with your whole hearts! Such is the whole object of my sermon. Crucified Jesus! this is the day on which Thou hadst to die and shed Thy blood; show, I beseech Thee especially on this day, to us poor sinners the power of Thy blood, which still cries to Heaven for mercy; let there be no heart so hard that it will not soften and move to true and lasting repentance! This we beg of Thee through that same blood of Thine shed for us, and through the burning tears that on this day Thy loving Mother Mary and the angels of peace shed at Thy death!

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It is a fearful thing to be guilty of human blood.

What a terrible thing it is, and how intolerable in the sight of God, to be guilty of the blood of a human being, is evident from the strict laws given by the Almighty to His people against all who should unjustly, nay, even through carelessness, take the life of a fellow-creature. "What hast thou done?" said He to Cain, the first murderer, showing him the gravity of his crime and the punishment that awaited it. "The voice of thy brother's blood crieth to Me from the earth. Now, therefore, cursed shalt thou be upon the earth, which hath opened her mouth and received the blood of thy brother at thy hand."¹ Immediately after the deluge He made the general law: "Whosoever shall shed man's blood, his blood shall be shed: for man was made to the image of God."² He says to the judges: "You shall not take money of him that is guilty of blood, but he shall die forthwith;" for his crime cannot otherwise be atoned for "but by his blood that hath shed the blood of another."³ He forbids all mercy to murderers: "Thou shalt not pity him,"⁴ but at once revenge the blood that has been shed. In case the dead body of a murdered man was found and the perpetrators of the crime still remained undiscovered, God commanded the priests and elders of the town nearest the place of the murder to assemble, and in the presence of the dead to declare: "Our hands did not shed this blood, nor did our eyes see it; be merciful to thy people Israel; lay not innocent blood to their charge. . . And the guilt of blood shall be taken from them."⁵ With such great care and exactness does God look after the safety of human life.

Much more fearful to be guilty of the blood of Christ.

Now, if this has always been the case with regard to the life of the poorest and meanest mortal who is innocent of crime, how highly must not the Almighty value the blood of the Incarnate Son of God! St. Augustine writes of the philosopher Aristippus, that, as he was once on sea, a violent storm arose, and through fear and anguish the philosopher became of the color of death, and began to tremble all over his body. When the

¹ Quid fecisti? Vox sanguinis fratris tui clamat ad me de terra. Nunc igitur maledictus eris super terram, quæ aperuit os suum, et suscept sanguinem fratris tui de manu tua.—Gen. iv. 10, 11.

² Quicumque effuderit humanum sanguinem, fundetur sanguis illius; ad imaginem quippe Dei factus est homo.—Ibid. ix. 6.

³ Non accipietis pretium ab eo qui reus est sanguinis, statim et ipse morietur; nec aliter explari potest, nisi per ejus sanguinem, qui alterius sanguinem fuderit.—Num. xxxv. 31, 33.

⁴ Non misereberis ejus.—Deut. xix. 13.

⁵ Manus nostræ non effuderunt sanguinem hunc, nec oculi viderunt. Propitius esto populo tuo Israel, et ne reputes sanguinem innocentem in medio populi tui Israel. Et auferetur ab eis reatus sanguinis.—Ibid. xxi. 7, 8.

reckless sailors laughed and jeered at him on account of his fears, yes, said he, it is easy for you to laugh! If you go to the bottom you will be no great loss; but with me the world would lose a philosopher. All ye mere mortals who have ever been from the beginning of the world, and still are, bring together all your blood, and see whether it is equal in price to a single drop of the blood of the Incarnate Son of God! For if the blood of all men were shed in the most cruel manner, the loss after all would be but small. And yet the great God esteems the life of a poor mortal so highly that He wishes it to be atoned for, if shed unjustly, only by the blood of the guilty one. How highly then must He not esteem the most precious and holy blood of His own divine Son! And what curses and maledictions he who sheds but a drop of it will draw down on his head!

Now, Christians, turn your eyes hither and tremble! This day we find the dead body of the Son of God, murdered on the summit of Mount Calvary, and hanging on a gibbet! All His blood has been shed to the last drop; the whole road, from the Garden of Olives to Calvary, is sprinkled with it. Try to overcome the sentiments of horror that this sight must inspire you with, and see the sequel. In the Garden of Gethsemani the blood of Jesus began to flow; for there He had to struggle with the natural sense of repugnance, anguish, and dread inspired by the approach of a cruel death, with the shame arising from the fact of His having taken on Himself the abomination of all the sins of the world in the sight of His heavenly Father, and with the lively images presented to His mind of the wickedness, ingratitude, and eternal damnation of countless mortals. In this struggle and combat "His sweat," as St. Luke says, "became as drops of blood trickling down upon the ground,"¹ and moistening it all around.

In Pilate's house His blood flowed no longer through the pores of His body, but through wounds opened on all sides like so many channels. "Then, therefore, Pilate took Jesus, and scourged Him."² The number of wounds received by the innocent Saviour in this cruel flagellation; the barbarity of the executioners who relieved each other; the encouragement given them by the high-priests, who would willingly have seen Our Lord expire under their hands, for fear lest He might be at last liberated

Which was shed to the last drop in the Garden.

In the scourging.

¹ Factus est sudor ejus sicut guttæ sanguinis decurrentis in terram.—Luke xxii. 44.

² Tunc ergo apprehendit Pilatus Jesum, et flagellavit.—John xix. 1.

by Pilate; the savage exultation of the whole people; the idea Pilate had of moving the Jews to pity by the sight of that mangled and tortured body;—all these circumstances show sufficiently that the Son of God must have here shed an enormous quantity of blood.

In the crowning with thorns.

That no part in His whole body might remain uninjured, nor a single drop of blood be concealed, the ruthless soldiers, although they had received no command to that effect, nor had any right to do so, wove a crown of sharp thorns and pressed it so violently on the head of Our Lord that the blood was forced out of His eyes. See Him now in the plight described long before by the Prophet Isaias: "From the sole of the foot unto the top of the head, there is no soundness therein: wounds and bruises and swelling sores."¹

In the crucifixion.

In this deplorable state He was led with the weight of the heavy cross on His shoulders to the summit of the high mount of Calvary. And here we must remember that, on account of the constant motion and shaking of His body, the blood flowed from the open wounds and sprinkled the whole way as He went along. On Calvary the terrible work of bloodshed is again resumed: the garments are torn from His body, and the wounds thereof are thus reopened; His hands and feet are pierced with nails and fastened to the shameful tree, and thus in four places the chief veins and arteries are opened. Whatever blood had naturally withdrawn itself to the heart, and so remained unshed, was taken with violence from His dead body: "One of the soldiers with a spear opened His side, and immediately there came out blood and water."² So that all the blood of Jesus Christ, the Incarnate Son of God, was shed, and that too in the most inhuman manner.

The angels had no share in it.

Who and where is he? Who is to blame for this? Raise your thoughts to heaven first, my dear brethren, and there begin your examination. Let us see whether we may not perhaps find the guilty one there. I find the angels in tears through pity for their bleeding Creator, as the Prophet Isaias says of them: "The angels of peace shall weep bitterly."³ So that their hot tears show clearly enough that they have no share in the murder of Jesus Christ. But perhaps their tears were only hypocritical; for the worst criminals know how to weep, at times, in order to per-

¹ *A planta pedis usque ad verticem, non est in eos sanitas: vulnus, et livor, et plaga tumens.*—Is. i. 6.

² *Unus militum lancea latus ejus aperuit, et continuo exiit sanguis et aqua.*—John xix. 34.

³ *Angeli pacis amare flebunt.*—Is. xxxiii. 7.

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suade the world to look on them as innocent. Besides, could not the angels easily have prevented the murder of the Son of God? Had they not already saved the people of God from danger, and destroyed the whole army of Sennacherib? Did they not help Peter when he was in prison on the eve of shedding his blood? Had they not much more reason to offer their assistance to the Son of God? Now he who can easily save another from the danger of death, and yet refuses his help, is justly held guilty of his death. But the angels are under a higher power; nor may they do anything unless they have first received the command and permission of their Creator. So that it was not for them to defend the blood of Christ and to save the Son of God from death; therefore they are innocent.

But now another doubt occurs to me. If the angels received neither command nor permission to prevent the death of the Son of God, then God must be to blame therefor, who could and, humanly speaking, should have issued that command. And so it is, my dear brethren. That the blood of Jesus Christ was shed even to the last drop is to be attributed, though without any fault, to God the Eternal Father, as the First Cause, who, from all eternity, had decreed the death of His Son. Witnesses of this are His own apostles, after they received the Holy Ghost, and could speak as if out of the mouth of God Himself, "For of a truth there assembled together in this city, against Thy holy child Jesus, whom Thou hast anointed, Herod, and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, to do what Thy hand and Thy counsel decreed to be done."¹ Speaking of these words, St. Leo thus apostrophizes the Jewish people: The benefits to be derived from the sufferings of Christ are for us, and we owe not the least gratitude for them either to you, Judas, or to you, cruel Jews! Your wickedness has helped to our salvation, but contrary to your will. You are mere tools and instruments, and have carried into execution what the hand and counsel of the Almighty had decreed. Truly an incomprehensible mystery! Did God command that His only Son, equal to Himself, should have His blood poured out to the last drop? The world is still amazed whenever it thinks of the singular command given by God to Abraham the Patriarch, to bring his only son to the top of a mountain, and

The First Cause of it (without guilt) is the Eternal Father.

¹ Convenerunt enim vere in civitate ista, adversus sanctum puerum tuum Jesum, quem unxisti, Herodes et Pontius Pilatus, cum gentibus et populis Israel, facere quæ manus tua et consilium tuum decreverunt fieri.—Acts iv. 27, 28.

there slay him; yet this was merely the case of a mortal whose life was wholly in the hands of God; and even then the Lord did not permit the command to be carried out, but was content with the ready obedience shown by Abraham, and released him from the necessity of the bloody sacrifice. Now, on the contrary, the heavenly Father gives up His Son into the hands of murderers, not, as He knew, to be saved from them by an angel, but rather to be done to death in the most barbarous manner.

And that through inconceivable love for man. Shown by an example after the manner of a simile.

Why, O most just God, dost Thou act in this amazing and incomprehensible way? What is the reason of it? Hear, my dear brethren, the words of two apostles. St. John says: "God so loved the world as to give His only-begotten Son . . . that the world may be saved by Him."¹ "He that spared not even His own Son," says St. Paul, "but delivered Him up for us all."² Thus has the great God loved me and all of you, that even by the death of His Son He would save us from the jaws of hell! To have some slight idea of this incomprehensible love by comparing it to human feelings, hear what John Mariana writes of Alfonso, king of Spain: Besieged by the Moors, he had defended himself and his town a long time with great bravery; but in a sally made by the Spaniards his son happened to be cut off by the enemy and taken prisoner. The Moorish tyrant now thought he would easily reduce Alfonso to submission; he caused a lofty stage to be erected before the walls of the town, led forth the captive prince, drew his sword, and cried out in a voice of thunder: Alfonso, either surrender or lose your son! Unhappy father, what course will you now take? Your father's heart will not permit you to look on while your son is being butchered; your kingly duty and fidelity to your subjects will not suffer you to deliver them into the slavery of a tyrant; and it was this latter feeling that conquered. Let my son die, he cried out, if only my subjects live! I will be faithful to them even at the expense of my natural feelings! I cannot think of my fatherly affection when I consider what I owe my subjects! And so saying, he threw his own sword down over the wall; take it, he exclaimed, and kill my son with it, if you wish, provided only my people can live in safety! My dear brethren, such was the plight in which the whole human race found itself; it was besieged for many thousand years by the divine jus-

¹ Sic Deus dilexit mundum, ut Filium suum unigenitum daret . . . ut salvetur mundus per ipsum.—John iii. 16, 17.

² Proprio Filio suo non pepercit, sed pro nobis omnibus tradidit illum.—Rom. viii. 32.

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tice, and oppressed with a harassing siege, as well as with the threat of everlasting damnation; to raise that siege the Son of God Himself came down from heaven to earth, and was taken prisoner by justice; then too it was said of Him: Either surrender or lose Thy Son! Heavenly Father! either deliver up men to the punishment due to them, or else Thou wilt lose Thy only Son! Enter in thought into the abyss of God's fatherly heart. Since Christ as God is equal to the Father in all things, the Father loves Him infinitely and beyond measure; while as man He loves His Son and esteems Him more than all creatures put together. If all the people on earth were lost and damned eternally, His happiness would be as little disturbed thereby as ours is when a fly in the room is caught by a spider and devoured. And yet (O unheard-of love!) God arrives at this conclusion: Let My Son die, that man may have life! Take away My Son, mock Him, scourge Him, crown Him with thorns, crucify Him, slaughter Him as ye will, shed the last drop of His blood, that man may be redeemed! "God so loved the world as to give His only-begotten Son." So that if the Eternal Father is the cause of the shedding of the blood of Christ, His exceeding love and mercy are to be blamed therefor. O God of infinite goodness! far be it from us to lay any blame on Thee on that account! Infinite are the thanks we owe Thy goodness and love, for having thus not spared even the blood of Thy own Son! For without that, where should we be now? Where should we be in eternity?

And now, my dear brethren, keep your thoughts quiet for a moment. What are the feelings of your hearts in the consideration of such great love? God gives up His only Son for me to the slaughter; can there then be anything in the world so dear to me, that I am not ready to renounce it if He desires me to do so? God gives up His only Son for me to the greatest tortures; can there then be in my heart any foolish love for a mortal creature, that I am not willing at once to sacrifice to Him? God gives His only Son for me to the shameful death of the cross; shall I then refuse to die to my own pride and the vanity of the world, so far as not to adhere to it any more against His law? God gives His only Son for me a strict command and express injunction not to spare one drop of His blood; can I then refuse to give up a handful of worldly wealth that I perhaps possess unjustly? God gives His only Son for me to the gibbet of the cross; shall I then complain and murmur against Him, if, in order to prove my love, He sends

It is but just then that we should love God in return.

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me trials? God gives His only Son for me that I may not be damned eternally; shall I not then make room for Him in my heart, and give my whole heart to Him, that I may be eternally happy with Him? for this is the sacrifice that He requires in return for His Son's life, and for the blood He shed. Think then of this, each one of you; compare these two sacrifices with each other, and see what justice requires you to do. Meanwhile I go on with my examination.

Christ cannot be blamed for shedding His own blood.

We must absolve the almighty heavenly Father from all blame in shedding the blood of His Son; for He sacrificed Him through sheer love and mercy, and because that sacrifice was required for our salvation. But the matter is not yet settled; for great as are His love and mercy for us, had He a right to spill innocent blood on account of them? We have a merciful, but at the same time a most just God, who cannot condemn or punish one who has committed no fault. I ask then further: is not perhaps the Son of God guilty of His own blood? Did He not deserve death for some crime or other? You are horrified and dismayed at such a question, and you remind me of the words of St. Paul, who says of Christ that He is "holy, innocent, undefiled, separated from sinners."¹ You bring forward in answer to my question the testimony even of those who helped to shed the blood of Christ, or who were present at that tragedy, for they bore witness to His innocence: "The chief priests," says St. Matthew, "and the whole council sought false witness against Jesus, that they might put Him to death," but they found not the slightest testimony worthy of faith against Him: "And they found not, whereas many false witnesses had come in."² Judas, who betrayed Him publicly, confesses the great sin he committed in betraying innocent blood: "I have sinned in betraying innocent blood."³ Pilate is warned by his wife not to dare to pronounce sentence against Jesus the Just: "And as he was sitting in the place of judgment, his wife sent to him, saying: Have thou nothing to do with that just Man."⁴ Pilate, the judge himself, acknowledges that Our Lord was accused through sheer envy, and that He was therefore

¹ Sanctus, innocens, impollutus, segregatus a peccatoribus.—Heb. vii. 26.

² Principes sacerdotum, et omne concilium, querebant falsum testimonium contra Jesum, ut eum morti traderent; et non invenerunt, cum multi falsi testes accessissent.—Matt. xxvi. 59, 60.

³ Peccavi, tradens sanguinem justum.—Ibid. xxvii. 4.

⁴ Sedente autem illo pro tribunali, misit ad eum uxor ejus, dicens: Nihil tibi et justo illi.—Ibid. 19.

innocent: "For he knew that for envy they had delivered Him."¹ And again, in presence of all the people, he said that he could find no guilt in Him: "Behold, I bring Him forth unto you, that you may know that I find no cause in Him."² One of the thieves on the cross proclaimed His innocence at the hour of His death: "We indeed justly, for we receive the due reward of our deeds, but this Man hath done no evil."³ The centurion and the whole crowd who had assisted at His execution, and kept guard over Him, when they felt the earth trembling under their feet, gave loud testimony to His Godhead, and thereby to His complete innocence and righteousness: "Indeed this was the Son of God."⁴ Such a number of proofs, given even by His enemies, is sufficient for you to convince me that Jesus had committed no crime, and therefore was innocent of the shedding of His own blood.

You are right; but be that as it may, He nevertheless consented to His own death, and voluntarily accepted it. His heavenly Father indeed told Him of it; but at the same time left Him to His own free will to redeem the world or not. It depended then on Himself to shed His blood, or not. And that is what He Himself says: "I lay down My life. . . . No man taketh it away from Me; but I lay it down of Myself."⁵ My Father has asked the sacrifice of Me, and I have said: Thy will be done. "He was offered because it was His own will,"⁶ says Isaias of Him. Nay, not only did He wish it, but most eagerly did He run to meet His death; the time seemed long to Him until the wished-for hour approached: "I have a baptism, wherewith I am to be baptized," He says in the Gospel of St. Luke; "and how am I straitened until it be accomplished?"⁷ The baptism of My blood is before Me, and the desire I feel for it is so great that I am quite uneasy until the time for it arrives. But no injustice is done to a man by acting according to his will; therefore He has to ascribe the shedding of His blood to Himself. So that we have one guilty One in heaven, namely, the Son of God Himself; the most innocent has been pleased to be guilty. But what made Him so? He

Yet He is the Second Cause, because He consented to die for us.

¹ Sciebat enim quod per invidiam tradidissent eum.—Matt. xxvii. 18.

² Ecce adduco vobis eum foras, ut cognoscatis quia nullam invenio in eo causam.—John xix. 4.

³ Nos quidem juste, nam digna factis recipimus; hic vero nihil mali gessit.—Luke xxiii. 41.

⁴ Vere Filius Dei erat iste.—Matt. xxvii. 54.

⁵ Ego pono animam meam. . . . Nemo tollit eam a me, sed ego pono eam a meipso.—John x. 17, 18.

⁶ Oblatus est quia ipse voluit.—Is. liii. 7.

⁷ Baptisme habeo baptizari; et quomodo coarctor usque dum perficiatur?—Luke xii. 50.

“loved me,” as St. Paul says in answer to this question; He loved me and you and all of us, “and delivered Himself for me;” through love for me He gave Himself up to the justice of God, and suffered what I deserved by my sins. He offered Himself as a Pledge to the Eternal Father to pay by His blood the atonement for all the sins of the world.

Yet His love has no effect on most Christians; of which He complains.

Let us again keep our thoughts quiet, my dear brethren. What do we owe Him, who not only freely shed every drop of His blood for us, but even bound Himself to do so as our Pledge and Hostage? What has He deserved from us? No tears of repentance? No sighs of sorrow? No acknowledgment? No gratitude? No love in return? What does Jesus deserve from you and me for His unheard-of love for us? Is it only hatred and ingratitude? Only a continuance of contempt and persecution? Only redoubled and cruelly-renewed murderous blows, which we inflict on Him so often by our sins, whenever we commit them? Ah, Jesus! is not that the only return made Thee by many of Thy Christians, even after they have meditated on Thee bathed in Thy blood through sheer love for them? Well mayest Thou complain by Thy Prophet Ezechiel: “Great pains have been taken, and the great rust thereof,” the rust of the wickedness of My people, “is not gone out.”¹ Thousands of drops of bloody sweat have I let fall, enough to soften even a stone, and indeed the hard rocks were rent through the pity of it; yet I cannot soften the perverse hearts of those Christians, so as to induce them at last to leave off offending Me. “Great pains have been taken:” from head to foot I have been torn in the bloody scourging, yet I cannot persuade the unchaste man for My sake to leave the proximate occasion of sin, to give up the impure intimacy he takes a swinish delight in. “Great pains have been taken:” My eyes swam with blood in the crowning with thorns; yet I am not able to induce My Christians to renounce that pride and worldly vanity that puts a stumbling-block in the way of so many. “Great pains have been taken:” I have allowed the blood to flow out of My veins through the wounds of My hands and feet, as through so many channels; yet I cannot persuade the drunkard and the glutton to lead temperate lives, or to cut off the occasion of the sins their vice gives rise to. “Great pains have been taken:” the last drop of blood that remained in My heart I freely gave when I was pierced

¹ Dilixit me et tradidit semetipsum pro me.—Gal. ii. 20.

² Multo labore sudatum est, et non exivit de ea nimia rubigo ejus.—Ezech. xxiv. 12.

with the lance; yet I cannot appease that angry man, or persuade him to forgive his neighbor for My sake. "Great pains have been taken:" all My blood was shed for men; yet I cannot induce them to change their lives for the better, and to love Me. "Great pains have been taken, and the great rust thereof is not gone out:" much have I labored and toiled, and yet the rust of wickedness is not cleansed. This is the price I get for shedding My blood. Ah, hard hearts that cannot be moved or softened by such excessive love!

I am no longer surprised at the anguish and bloody sweat of my Saviour in the Garden of Gethsemani. If there had been no future torments in store for Him to force the blood from His veins, the foreknowledge He had of the ingratitude of the people He ransomed so dearly should have sufficed to break His heart with grief. For we can easily imagine how grievously He who loved us unto death must have been afflicted on considering that so few would profit by His sufferings, and that all the blood shed for us would not suffice to keep us from sin or to win our love for Him. If He wept bitterly at the thought of the destruction impending over the city of Jerusalem, at the grave of the dead Lazarus, at the sight of the temporal want of the people, how great must have been His sorrow to think that after all His efforts to bring us to heaven, yet most men would despise the grace offered them, persist in sin, and be buried forever in the abyss of hell! We ourselves, hard-hearted as we are, are sometimes moved with pity for the indescribably vast number of infidels, Turks, heathens, Jews, heretics, who perish miserably in their blindness, although they have not cost us a drop of sweat. What a sharp wound it must then have inflicted on the heart of Our Lord to see so many thousand Christian souls, belonging to His own chosen and enlightened people, who cost Him every drop of His blood, daily dying in sin and going to eternal ruin!

Ah, dear Christian, think of this! "Forget not the kindness of thy surety," says the wise Ecclesiasticus; "for He hath given His life for thee."¹ What can keep us from sin if such a thought does not? Gellius writes of the son of King Cræsus, who was dumb from his birth, that seeing a soldier once drawing his sword to slay his father, the sight so filled him with terror that he suddenly gained the use of his tongue, and cried out: O man, do not kill the king! And the same cry might almost be forced

That was the cause of His anguish in the Garden.

Exhortation never to offend this Lover.

¹ Gratiam fidejussoris ne obliviscaris: dedit enim pro te animam suam. - Eccles. xxix. 20.

from the senseless stocks and stones at the sight of a Christian about to sin: O man, restrain thyself; slay not the Saviour who gave His life and His blood for thee! “Forget not the kindness of the surety” who loved thee even to death; do not make Him such an infamous return for His love. In the hope of inducing all to refrain from sin in future, I now proceed further in the examination we have begun. In heaven we have found the Eternal Father and the Son of God to have been the Cause of the shedding of the blood of Christ, but out of sheer love and mercy to men, for which reason we owe the Almighty infinite thanks and constant love. There are others whom we have to consider who had a part in the sufferings of Our Lord, but quite a wicked one, so that we have reason to be indignant and angry with them. We shall find them on earth; as we shall see in the next part of our meditation.

Second Part.

Pilate is guilty of the blood of Christ.

Not to spend too much time in this examination, I at once assail those who were guilty of the murder of the Son of God. “And Pilate gave sentence that it should be as they required.”¹ Pilate the governor gave sentence against Jesus and delivered Him over to the will of the Jews. The envious high-priests, the rabid Jews, kept on their cry of “crucify Him! crucify Him!” until they had obtained this cruel sentence. The soldiers and executioners laid hands on Him, scourged Him, crowned Him with thorns, crucified and murdered Him. All these wicked men spilled innocent blood; the crime is clearly registered in the divine history, nor is there any excuse for them. Yet I will not deprive them of whatever chance they may have of justification; let us see who is most to blame, who has the most to answer for in shedding the blood of the Son of God. Pilate washes his hands, seated on his tribunal in the presence of the people, and declares himself innocent: “I am innocent of the blood of this just Man;” I have examined the charges you bring against Him; I find there is no foundation for, no truth in them, and therefore there can be no guilt in Him; I have left it to you to decide whether you will free Him from death instead of the notorious murderer Barabbas; to satisfy your fury against Him, I have caused Him to be scourged over His whole body; in this mangled condition I have presented Him to you, and asked whether you still recognize

¹ Pilatus adjudicavit fieri petitionem eorum.—Luke xxiii. 24.

in Him the appearance of a human being, so as to keep you from desiring His death; but all to no purpose! You still continue to cry out with more ferocity than ever: crucify Him! crucify Him! to the gibbet with Him! Be it so, then. "Take Him, you, and crucify Him."¹ But I protest before you and the whole world, and those that are to come after us, "that I find no cause in Him;" and therefore I will have no hand in His death. "I am innocent of the blood of this just Man, look you to it;" see how you will be able to answer for it. But Pilate, do you think you can clear yourself in that way? Truly, as St. Ambrose remarks, yours is a curious kind of innocence! "What was the good of giving testimony of His innocence, if you delivered Him up into the hands of wickedness?"² What else could be the effect of your mode of action if not to make your crime all the greater, for you allowed to be executed and crucified One who was innocent, and to whose justice you publicly testified? Wash your hands as long as you please; you will not thereby cleanse the stain of your unjust and wicked heart. Nor did you need a knowledge of the divine law to make you guilty; you were a heathen indeed, but still a human being. Reason and nature tell you that to condemn one whose innocence is known, or even to allow him to be persecuted, makes the judge sharer in the guilt of the death or persecution.

"Receive instruction, you that judge the earth,"³ and learn from it. What, then? "Judge for the needy and fatherless: do justice to the humble and the poor." Rescue them from the hands of their persecutors: "Rescue the poor, and deliver the needy out of the hand of the sinner."⁴ Mark the warning of the Wise Man: "Seek not to be made a judge, unless thou have strength enough to extirpate iniquities: lest thou fear the person of the powerful, and lay a stumbling-block for thy integrity."⁵ Finally, hear the words even of the heathen Cicero: "He is an unjust judge who is influenced either by envy or favor or fear."⁶ Pilate was of this class; through fear of losing the favor of the emperor, he condemned One whom he knew to be innocent:

Moral
lesson for
rulers.

¹ Accipite eum vos, et crucifigite.—John xix. 6.

² Quid profuit testimonium perhibuisse innocentiae, et velut reum addixisse nequitiae?—S. Ambr. Serm. 49.

³ Erudimini, qui iudicatis terram.—Ps. li. 10.

⁴ Judicate egeno et pupillo: humilem et pauperem justificate. Eripite pauperem, et egenum de manu peccatoris liberate.—Ibid. lxxx. 3, 4.

⁵ Noli querere fieri iudex, nisi valeas virtute irrumperere iniquitates; ne forte extimescas faciem potentis, et ponas scandalum in aequitate tua.—Eccles. vii. 6.

⁶ Iniquus est iudex qui aut invidet, aut favet, aut timet.

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“He delivered Him unto them to be crucified,”¹ and at the same time he flatters himself that he is innocent: “I am innocent!”

For those who have a false conscience.

O false conscience! Here I must bewail the error of many men: false conscience! imaginary innocence! alas! how many souls thou dost blind, and lead quite tranquilly before the judgment-seat of God, there to hear the sentence of everlasting damnation! To shed hypocritical tears, to have a natural feeling of compassion when meditating on the passion of Christ, now and then to confess one's sins with a faulty and fruitless contrition, often to approach the table of the Lord, to give an alms to the poor, to pray at the usual times, to sit for hours in the church—if one can boast of doing these things, oh, then he says: “I am innocent.” I am a good and pious Christian. And with all this, although through negligence or carelessness or design a poor man is forced to sweat his blood, if not actually to shed it; although goods are gained or possessed unjustly; although an impure love, or a secret hatred and anger, or a bitter desire of revenge, or some other vicious passion is allowed to find room in the heart; although the morals, the outward and inward demeanor are quite contrary to and inconsistent with the holy law of the gospel of Jesus Christ; although life is ordered according to the usages of the perverse world; although many grievous obligations of a Christian remain unfulfilled—oh, all that makes little matter; one hardly thinks of such things! “I am innocent!” O false conscience! imaginary innocence! For it is all the more dangerous, the deeper it leads men into guilt and the longer it keeps them in the state of sin, thus bringing them quietly and without fear or anxiety to the very gates of hell. Ah, how I pity those unfortunate souls who thus deplorably deceive themselves!

Still more guilty are the high-priests and Jews.

I return to Pilate. The divine and human law, nature and reason pronounce against him that he is really guilty of shedding the blood of Jesus Christ our Saviour. But is Pilate the most guilty, the most deserving of punishment? No! Christ Himself says that his crime is not so great as that of others, whose guilt and malice surpassed his. For He said to him: “Therefore he that hath delivered Me to thee hath the greater sin.”² In these words, as St. Augustine remarks, He alluded to the traitor Judas, who sold Him for thirty pieces of silver, and also to the high-priests and scribes, who caused Jesus to be ap-

¹ Jesum tradidit eis ut crucifigeretur.—Matt. xxvii. 26.

² Propterea qui me tradidit tibi, majus peccatum habet.—John xix. 11.

prehended, and incited the Jewish people not to desist until His blood was all shed. All these committed a greater sin than Pilate, who sought in every way possible to free Our Lord. Are they, then, the most guilty of all of the blood of Christ? With regard to the executioners and torturers who actually laid hands on and crucified Him, the dying Son of God said on the cross: "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."¹ The other co-operators in His death He caused to be excused in some degree by His apostles afterwards before the world; amongst others St. Paul writes to the Corinthians: "If they had known it, they would never have crucified the Lord of glory."² Meanwhile, their ignorance was culpable. The doctrine daily preached by Christ to the Jews, the shining example of His holy life, the many evident miracles worked in their presence, the prophecies that were clearly fulfilled in Him, were proofs sufficient to convince them that He was the true Messiah and the Son of God; therefore their ignorance was not to be excused nor palliated, and they had their share of the guilt of His murder.

Christians, how many sins are still committed in our own days through a similar culpable ignorance! When, namely, we neglect certain laws, truths, duties, and obligations of our state and occupation, because we do not understand them clearly, or have only an indistinct idea of them; although we should and could know what to do in doubtful cases, did we use the necessary diligence in acquiring the information proper to the case; when we do not frequent sermons and instructions through idleness, laziness, and love of ease and comfort, and thus lose the opportunity of hearing our duties explained; when we give occasion to sin, and allure or tempt others thereto by the practice of certain abuses that we do not wish to acknowledge as sinful, because we shut our eyes to the objections that can be urged against them, or seek out all sorts of frivolous pretexts to excuse them from harm. How many sins too are committed by wives, because their husbands through foolish affection, do not correct or admonish them; how many by children, through culpable ignorance, carelessness, want of instruction, correction, and Christian training and good example! But these are things that do not even occur to one's mind when the conscience is examined

Instruction
for the culpably ignorant.

¹ Pater, dimitte illis; non enim sciunt quid faciunt.—Luke xxiii. 34.

² Si cognovissent, nunquam Dominum gloriæ crucifixissent.—1. Cor. ii. 8.

preparatory to confession. Oh, exclaims St. John Chrysostom, "the time will surely come when God will punish our ignorance!"¹ Not without reason did the prophet beseech the Almighty, saying: "My ignorances do not remember."²

But all these could do nothing against Christ, unless something else had authorized the shedding of His blood.

I have departed somewhat from my subject, my dear brethren; yet what I have said is not foreign to the examination we have in hand. We have not yet laid hands on the greatest criminal of all, on him who has the greatest share of guilt in the blood of Christ. All those of whom we have been speaking hitherto are merely the tools and instruments that pressed that most sacred blood out of the veins of the Lord; they are like the hammer and nails, that indeed inflicted the wounds, but could not of themselves have done anything to injure Our Lord unless they had been used and set in motion by some greater power. What could Judas have done, whose treachery the Lord might have prevented in a thousand ways if He had so willed? What could the Jews have done, out of whose hands He so often escaped, whom He more than once drove out of the temple with a scourge, and whom even now He might hurl into hell if He were so minded? What could the soldiers and executioners have done, whom He caused to fall prostrate on the ground in the Garden, by the one word: "I am He"? What could Pilate have done, to whom Our Lord said that he could have no power over Him unless it were given him from above? So that there was no power in heaven, on earth, nor in hell, that was able to take a single drop of blood from Him, unless some stronger motive had induced Him to shed it.

For our sins are the first and chief cause of the shedding of the blood of Christ.

And what was that? Ah, Christians! would that I had not carried this inquiry so far! would that I might leave this question unanswered! But what good purpose would my silence serve, since my heart and yours, my conscience and yours, would still betray us before the Almighty; since they would accuse us before the crucified as the authors and causes of the shedding of His blood? We know from the Prophet Isaias what moved the heavenly Father, as well as the only-begotten Son of God Himself, the One to ordain that bloody death, the other to accept it so freely. "For the wickedness of My people have I struck Him."³ "Christ the Lord is taken in our sins," says the

¹ O erit, erit quando etiam Ignorantiæ poenas dabimus!—S. Chrys. Hom. 26., in Ep. ad Rom.

² Ignorantias meas ne memineris.—Ps. xxiv. 7.

³ Propter scelus populi mei percussit eum.—Is. liii. 8.

Prophet Jeremias in the Lamentations.¹ Yes, so it is : the sins of the world are the first and the last to blame for the death of Jesus Christ ; if it had not been for them the heavenly Father would not have condemned His Son, nor would that Son have shed His blood ; nay, according to theologians it is probable He would not even have become man. Imagine a worthless son, born of rich and respectable parents, who on account of his lawless life is captured by the civil powers and condemned to the gallows. What are the afflicted parents to do in order to avert the shame from the family? They offer all their substance to obtain the freedom of their son, although they know that henceforth they will be obliged to live in poverty. Now who made them poor? You will say perhaps that they themselves are to blame, since they were so foolish as to give away all they had? But such is not the case. See, wicked son, see into what misery you have precipitated your loving parents! You are the cause of the poverty and want that oppress them! Christ Jesus! dearest Saviour! it is true Thou hast freely given all Thy blood, because Thou wert pleased to do so; art Thou then the cause of Thy own death? O sin! what a monster thou art! Thou and nothing else hast put Jesus to death. It was to save us from the eternal death we had deserved by our sins that Jesus had to die on the gibbet! And moreover, what is still more monstrous, as we know from the Apostle, all those who commit sin crucify Him anew: "Crucifying again to themselves the Son of God,"² as I shall show more in detail on a future occasion, and prove that the sufferings of Christ are not yet finished, but that all the mysteries of them are still renewed daily by wicked Christians. Now I ask: is there any one of us here in this church innocent? Be on your guard! I warn you all in the words of the Prophet Jeremias; we are standing now in the presence of the Crucified, and His bleeding wounds will convict and condemn us: "And thou hast said: I am without sin and am innocent. Behold I will contend with thee in judgment."³ O my God, why should I try to hide it? "To Thee only have I sinned, and have done evil before Thee."⁴ Before Thine eyes I have committed many crimes! In my name and yours I publicly confess before heaven

¹ Christus Dominus captus est in peccatis nostris.—Lam. iv. 20.

² Rursum crucifigentes sibi metipsos Filium Dei.—Heb. vi. 6.

³ Dixisti: Absque peccato et innocens ego sum. Ecce ego iudicio contendam tecum.—Jer. ii. 35.

⁴ Tibi soli peccavi, et malum coram te feci.—Ps. i. 6.

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and earth : we have all sinned, and are therefore all guilty of the blood of Christ ; and indeed we are the most guilty of all, because we have knowingly and wilfully perpetrated that cruelty, and because we have so often renewed the sufferings and death of our Redeemer ! Thus we have at last come upon the really guilty ones ; by our own confession we sinful Christians are the most guilty of all.

But He gives His blood to obtain pardon from God even for the worst sinners.

And now, what is our sentence to be? To be guilty of the blood of a poor mortal is a terrible thing, and most strictly forbidden by the Almighty God, as we have seen in the beginning; what a fearful thing must it not then be to be guilty of the blood of the Son of God! Alas! I seem to hear the awful words spoken in the Second Book of Kings against the unfortunate Amalécite: "Thy blood be upon thy own head, for thy own mouth hath spoken against thee, saying: I have slain the Lord's anointed."¹ Yes, it is true, and we cannot deny it. If we should be condemned to eternal death for our cruelty, even then our crime, our deicide, would not be blotted out; for we have deserved not one, but a thousand hells. But, O sinners! be comforted with me! That very blood shed by us earns for us, by the mercy of the Son of God, grace and forgiveness and eternal life. Hear the gracious sentence which the Lord speaks by His prophets and apostles for our consolation: "Live; yes, I said to thee: Live thou that art in thy blood;"² since the Son of God has given thee His for thy salvation. And as St. Paul assures us, it is Christ "in whom we have redemption through His blood, the remission of sins, according to the riches of His grace, which hath superabounded in us."³ If our vices cry to Heaven for vengeance, yet the blood shed for us by Christ cries in still more piercing tones for mercy, if we only make ourselves participators of it by true penance. If you wish to see the accomplishment of these promises look back on the history of the Jewish people; they called down the blood of Christ upon themselves and their children, and the Son of God has given it to many of them to convert and bring them to eternal life. They who returned repentant from Mount Calvary; Paul who had been a cruel persecutor of Christ and His Church; several thousands who were con-

¹ Sanguis tuus super caput tuum, os enim tuum locutum est adversum te dicens: Ego interfeci Christum Domini.—II. Kings 1. 16.

² Vive, dixi, inquam, tibi: In sanguine tuo vive.—Ezech. xvi. 6.

³ In quo habemus redemptionem per sanguinem ejus, remissionem peccatorum, secundum divitias gratiæ ejus, quæ superabundavit in nobis.—Ephes. 1. 7, 8.

verted by the preaching of Peter: all were in the number of those on whom the blood of Christ was called down, and all were converted by the power of that blood. Courage then, sinful Christians, says St. Augustine; even the very blood they shed washed them from their sins; we are indeed more guilty than they, but His blood has all the more power and efficacy in our regard.

There are books filled with accounts of the wonders of the divine mercy worked in favor of the worst sinners by the blood of Christ. I will relate but one taken from Father Lireus. A young man, who besides being addicted to other vices, was also passionately fond of playing cards, was on one occasion so unfortunate as to lose all the money he had, and moreover to incur debts that he had no prospect of paying. As is usual among gamblers, his losses made him so desperate, that amongst other blasphemies which he gave utterance to, was the following: Christ! Thou canst do no more against me than Thou hast done this evening, and so I no longer fear Thy threats! Wicked tongue! What? nothing worse could be done to thee? Wait a little and thou wilt see what can still be done to thee! That very evening, as he was driving home with his companion, the carriage overturned and broke his leg, leaving his companion unhurt; this accident threw him into a fever, and he became so ill that in a few days the doctor despaired of his life. Then the unhappy man saw that God could do something worse to him; but instead of being brought by that knowledge to repent of his sins, he began in his desperation to blaspheme still worse. O God, he exclaimed, Thou hast a pleasure in showing me that Thou canst torture me still more severely; now show that Thou canst afflict me with the greatest misfortune of all, and since after the loss of fortune, health, and life, there can be nothing worse than eternal damnation, show Thy power, and hurl me into the abyss of hell! If I were Thy God, I would do the same to Thee! Christian ears, how horrified you must be to hear such fearful blasphemy! Heavens, have ye no thunder-bolt to take such a wretch at his word, and precipitate him into hell? Hear the sequel, my dear brethren. Since in his despair and madness he would not listen to any exhortation, his servant entered the room, and whispered to the sick man. Sir, said he, there is a good friend here who would like to say good-bye to you. Who is it? asked the dying man; tell him to come in. Then the servant drew forth a crucifix; there, he said, there is your best Friend, who now wishes to

Shown by
an example.

speak to you. The sick man, suddenly struck by the light of grace, stared at the crucifix with glassy eyes; and the crucifix, as if it were living, returned his gaze, and spoke these words to his heart: My child, I will show thee that I wish to do the very best, and not the worst for thee; if I had wished to condemn thee to hell, I could a hundred times have done so; but no, My child! the blood I have shed has ordained not what is worst, but what is best for thee. If thou wert My God, thou wouldst hurl Me into hell. I am thy God, and although thou hast never yet deserved it, I will make thee eternally happy with Me in heaven. This interior voice made such an impression on the heart of the sick man (and how could it be otherwise?) that with bitter tears and sighs and sobs he pressed the crucifix to his lips, and made a general confession of his whole life with such signs of sorrow, that the confessor could not restrain his tears; and thus kissing the crucifix and sighing with love of God he gave up his happy spirit into the arms of the Crucified. O dearest blood of Jesus Christ, what power thou hast! How wonderfully thy voice penetrates and moves to mercy and the forgiveness of sin!

Hence no sinner should despair, but trust in the blood of Christ, after the example of other sinners.

Sinners, no matter how wicked you are, despair not! The same blood that you are most guilty of is shed for your salvation; the same blood still flows to wash you from the filth of sin, and make you children of God, if you only wish to make use of it by true repentance. If there is any one of you so hardened that his heart cannot be moved to penance, then let him at least do this: let him kneel down before the crucifix and say but this prayer: O Lord Jesus Christ, by the blood Thou hast shed for me, touch my heart, so that I may see the miserable state in which I am, and truly repent and amend my life. Let him often repeat that prayer until at last it is granted. Such was the case with one who had spent years in grievous and abominable vices, and had often wished to be converted to God; but on account of his evil habits he looked on that as an impossibility; nor in spite of all his efforts could he bring himself to make a fervent act of contrition; full of sadness he went out of his house to seek consolation in company. At the door he found a poor and ragged beggar; he at once remembered the words of Christ, that whatever is done to the least of His little ones, He would take as done to Himself. He went back into the house and brought the beggar a whole loaf of bread, and with the utmost humility throwing himself at the poor man's feet, as if he were Our Lord Him-

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self, prayed as follows, while handing him the loaf: Jesus Christ, I see and adore Thee in the person of this poor man! I would willingly give Thee my heart, but it is too hard; I cannot! Take therefore now the loaf that I can give, and do with my heart, even against my will, as Thou pleasest. This humble sigh was so powerful, that he at once shed copious tears of contrition for his sins, and was ever afterwards most richly endowed by God with graces.

Hardened sinners, who are not minded to repent of and amend your wicked ways, nor to use any means of obtaining the grace of repentance, the last sentence is at hand for you! It is a terrible and grievous thing to be guilty of the blood of Jesus Christ; and yet as we have seen, and as experience and our faith teach, we hope for mercy and salvation from the same blood. But to be guilty of frustrating the blood of Christ, that is once for all a most desperate thing. That blood is shed for us all to the forgiveness of sins; but we shall be responsible, if by our fault we prevent it from producing its proper fruit and effect. And that is what you, hard hearts, do who are still minded to persist in sin, in spite of meditating on the passion and death of Christ. But know: "I will require His blood at thy hand,"¹ says the Lord. You will one day appear before My divine tribunal; then I shall require the blood of My Son at your hands, since by your fault it was frustrated of its effects. It was always crying to Me in heaven for grace and mercy; but you refused to hear its voice, despised it from year to year, and remained obstinate in wickedness; now it cries for nothing but vengeance and justice! Hear then the sentence I pronounce on you in the name of Jesus Christ the Crucified, in the words of the Prophet Ezechiel, before the image and the bleeding wounds of the Saviour: "I will deliver thee up to blood, and blood shall pursue thee: and whereas thou hast hated blood, blood shall pursue thee."² You have hated the blood that with infinite love was shed for you, for the sight of it did not move you to love your Saviour; therefore His blood shall pursue you forever.

God of justice and mercy! so far I, as a sinful mortal, have spoken against myself; now permit me to say a few words for myself. I acknowledge my guilt and my sins! I am guilty with others,

But wo to those hardened sinners who refuse to amend!

Protestation of innocence regarding them.

¹ Sanguinem ejus de manu tua requiram.—Ezech. iii. 18.

² Sanguini tradam te, et sanguis te persequetur: et cum sanguinem oderis, sanguis persequetur te.—Ibid. xxxv. 6.

and alas! am perhaps more guilty than any here, of shedding the blood of Thy Son my Redeemer! but that Thy blood should be frustrated in any who hear me now, or have heard me, on that head I wash my hands; "I am innocent of the blood of this just Man" as far as that is concerned; I am innocent of the blood of Him who is hanging before me on the cross. I have in my own small way given utterance to what Thy holy spirit has inspired me with; I have represented Thy justice as well as Thy mercy, in order to deter myself and all others from sin, and to encourage us to be faithful to Thy service; to that end I have reprov'd vice, held heaven out as a bait, hell as a threat, so that the blood of Thy Son might not be lost on any one; but if any one is determined in spite of all to misuse that blood to his own damnation, I am innocent, and cannot and will not accept any share in his guilt. Hardened sinners, who will not make up your minds to repent and love the God who died for you, "look you to it;" see how you will one day answer not only for shedding, but also for frustrating the blood of Jesus Christ; see what you will have to say when we shall all meet before His tribunal! "Look you to it!"

Hope in the blood of Christ, repentance for sins, purpose of amendment.

With the others, in whose number I hope are all here present, I prostrate myself in the name of all before my crucified Saviour, full of sorrow and contrition for my sins, by which I have so often made myself guilty of the blood of Thy Son; and I hope that meanwhile that blood will not be lost on me. A thousand times have I deserved to be hurled into hell; but Thy infinite mercy, O God, and the infinite love of my Redeemer give me the fervent hope of seeing Thee in heaven! And indeed Thou hast loved me before I loved Thee; how couldst Thou then reject me when I wish to be converted to Thee and to love Thee? And that is what I shall do, and do with my whole heart. It is a far greater wonder that Thy Son should die for me on the cross than that I should see Thee in heaven. If He has thus given Himself totally to me, which is far more, why shouldst Thou not for His sake give me heaven, which is far less? Dost Thou, O Lord, demand satisfaction and atonement from me for my sins? Then although I am so poor and needy as not to possess a farthing to pay that great debt, yet I will so manage that Thou shalt and must be content. Nay, if I had committed all the sins of the world, all that are noted in Thy great account-book, yet I can and will pay Thee more than I owe Thee. Behold the

blood that my Lord and Saviour shed for me; the same blood that I, alas! so often trampled under foot; that is what I offer Thee in payment! It is a treasure that belongs to me if I wish to accept it; for Thy Son, who is Lord and Master of it, has given it to me; it is a treasure far greater, infinitely more weighty than the pardon and eternal happiness that Thou canst give me; a single drop of this blood, because it is of infinite value, is more than enough to wash out an endless number of sins, if such there could be. By true repentance and detestation and confession of my sins I will now dip deep into this precious blood, and in giving it back to Thee all my debts are paid. And the same thought shall comfort and console me whenever the recollection of the number and malice of my past sins or the envious demon tries to drive me to despair or to make me down-hearted. I will keep fast hold on that assured hope; as little as the blood of Thy Son can be destroyed, so little can I be destroyed, if only I remain faithful to Thee. That is all I now have to do, and my earnest wish and purpose is never more for all eternity or for any cause whatsoever to offend Thee by any sin; to fight to the last drop of my blood against temptation, and to the end of my life to love Thee, my heavenly Father, who hast given Thy Son for my sake to death, and Thee, my dear Saviour Jesus Christ, who hast shed the last drop of Thy blood for me! But my weak strength is not sufficient for this, and I cannot rely on my resolution on account of my inconstancy; therefore by the blood of Jesus Christ I beg of Thee, O merciful God, to grant me Thy powerful grace! Therefore, in the words of the Church, I sigh to Thee, my crucified Saviour: we beseech Thee, therefore, help Thy servants whom Thou hast redeemed by Thy precious blood. Amen.

TWELFTH SERMON.

ON THE CIRCUMSTANCES OF THE DEATH OF CHRIST.

Subject.

1. Christ dies stripped of His garments, in the greatest poverty; we must also die poor with Him. 2. Jesus dies on the cross in the greatest agony; we too must live and die with Jesus on the cross.—*Preached on Good Friday.*

Text.

Crucifigentes eum, diviserunt vestimenta ejus.—Mark xv. 24.
 “Crucifying Him, they divided His garments.”

Introduction.

Like the golden-tongued and holy St. John Chrysostom, who on one occasion, almost dumb with sorrow, sighed forth, rather than said: “What am I to say? How can I give utterance to my thoughts?” even in the same way must I to-day with far greater reason exclaim: What shall I say? “for this is a day for tears, not for speech; for grief, not for words; for humble prayer, not for sermons.”¹ So great and terrible are the events that occurred on this day, the remembrance of which is yearly renewed at this season by the Catholic Church, that all tongues may well be struck dumb, words be turned into water, and hearts break with sorrow; for on this day we commemorate the passion and death of an immortal God suffering and expiring in a human body. An event the most terrible of all terrible things! To men it is the most wonderful of all wonderful things; to angels the greatest of all the mysteries revealed by the faith; to all creatures in heaven and on earth a spectacle, a tragedy that is qualified to fill the earth with a general and mournful silence and horror. The angels are amazed and weep bitterly; the demons are astonished and terrified; the heavens are stupefied and darkened; the rocks and mountains are panic-stricken and burst asunder; the living are amazed and strike their breasts; the dead are awakened and rise from their tombs; in a word the whole world is shaken and moved; nature falls as it were into a faint as the Creator hangs on the gallows and gives up the ghost! What am I to say? How shall I give utterance to my thoughts? How express myself in the midst of this universal amazement and confusion? Where shall I find words to describe the terrible event of the passion and death of Christ? I willingly acknowledge with St. Thomas of Villanova: Hell itself does not appear so terrible to me as to see God dying for sin; eternal torments even do not inspire me with such terror as the sight of the crucifix, of the dying Son of God. Surely I must be silent when all nature is struck dumb with astonishment. Thoughts alone remain to me. Even if terror sometimes deprives one of speech, the power of thought still remains

¹ Quid dicam, aut quid loquar? lachrymarum præsens tempus est, non verborum; luctuum, non sermonum; deprecationis, non conclusionis.—S. Chrys. Serm. 2. ad pop. Antioch.

active. Go with me then in thought, my dear brethren, to the summit of that mountain where my God and yours was crucified for us on this day; there in a quiet meditation we shall represent to our minds the dying Saviour, and derive many a fruitful lesson for our souls therefrom. The text I have chosen gives us especially two circumstances to consider: "Crucifying Him, they divided His garments." They divided His garments; one point. They crucified Him; the second point. They divided His garments: mark the poverty of the dying God. They crucified Him: mark the pain and agony suffered by the dying God. And this gives us the division of the meditation.

Plan of Discourse.

Jesus dies, stripped of His clothes in the greatest poverty. Therefore we too must die poor with Him: the first part. Jesus dies on the cross in the greatest agony. We too must and should live and die with Jesus on the cross: the second and longer part.

God, suffering and dying for us! by whose death we poor mortals are redeemed, and receive every good that is in us and that we still hope to receive, we beg of Thee by the intercession of Thy Mother and the weeping angels who sorrowed at Thy death, enlighten our minds and strengthen our will, that in the consideration of Thy poor and painful death we may be moved to detest our sins, despise all earthly goods, and be patient and resigned in all crosses and trials.

When the great and innocent Son of God came to the place of execution, after having endured many torments: namely after the terrible anguish and sadness in the Garden that drove the sweat from Him in drops of blood; after having been betrayed by one of His own intimate friends for thirty pieces of silver (the price usually paid for a head of cattle on the market), and delivered over to His cruel enemies; after having been abandoned by all His disciples, bound with chains, and led like a dog through the streets from one judge to the other; after having been torn and mangled from head to foot, like a beast that is flayed, with rods and scourges, crowned with sharp thorns, and mocked and ridiculed as a fool and mock king; after having been condemned to the gibbet as the worst of criminals and been forced to carry the heavy weight of the cross on His own shoulders (a punishment not usually inflicted on those condemned to

Jesus is
stripped of
His gar-
ments, that
He may die
poor and
naked.

die), and been thus obliged to ascend the steep hill of Calvary; when at last the moment came for God to die, "crucifying Him, they divided His garments;" they crucified Him and divided His garments among themselves. Come with me now in thought, my dear brethren. See how the cruel executioners drag Our Lord forward as He lies exhausted under the load of the cross, and pull Him upright by the hair; with the greatest violence they tear off His wounded body the clothes that have adhered to Him, and with them the flesh off His bones in great pieces. What pain that must have caused Him! We can form some idea of it if we try to tear from a sore finger the plaster that has adhered to the wound. The only point I now wish to dwell on is this: they stripped Him of His clothing, and having nailed Him to the cross, left Him, thus naked, hanging in the air.

What a terrible sight!

Jesus stripped of His clothing! What a terrible sight! To die between murderers on a place of execution—truly a shameful death for an honorable man! To die in the utmost agony on a gallows—truly a bitter death for any man! To die abandoned by all—truly a bitter death for an afflicted mortal! But for the virginal and chaste Son of God to hang there naked and bare before a rabble crowd, that must indeed surpass in bitterness all pain, agony, disgrace, nay, death itself! O ye heavens! how have you been able to tolerate the infliction of such shame on your Creator? O earth! why hast thou not opened thyself and swallowed down out of sight either the gaping multitude, or even thy insulted God Himself? O men! tear off your superfluous clothing with which you strut about so proudly! Dumb beasts, lay aside your wool and hair! Birds of the air, where are your feathers? He who has provided all of you with those things is now robbed of all, and has not wherewith to cover Himself! I am not surprised that the heavens and the earth were then moved with pity; that the sun was hidden under a dark cloud; that the moon and stars crept away so as not to see the shame inflicted on their Creator. Brutal lust! thou art the cause of this most lamentable sight by which all nature was horrified! Christians, who by indecency in dress give occasion to sin in yourselves and in others, exciting them to unlawful desires, you have a share in this; you have helped to strip your Redeemer of His garments. But I will not now speak of this odious vice.

We too shall die

Turn then your eyes and thoughts hither, vain children of the world, whose hearts are so strongly attached to the things of

earth, and who seek for the goods of this world with inordinate care. Come you too, O poor and needy, who have been deprived of your substance either unjustly or by some misfortune, so that you are now almost reduced to desperation in your poverty; behold Jesus is about to die, but in the utmost poverty, stripped of all the goods of the world! Poor and needy He came into this world in the stable of Bethlehem, and was laid on a bare board; poor and naked He is now about to die on the hard wood of the cross, without as much as a single thread in His possession. His clothes, that otherwise are usually left to friends in case of death, He gives as a prey to the soldiers to be divided amongst them, and His sorrowing Mother must look on and see that not the least thing belonging to her Son is left to her as a relic. Even the earth is taken away from under His feet, for He hangs in the air, although heaven and earth and all they contain are His own property. What should be our thoughts now, my dear brethren? Do we too think that we shall have to die? Or do we perhaps hope to have a long eternity on this earth? To live here forever is not possible; faith and daily experience teach us that. But if we do think of dying, as die we shall infallibly, sooner or later (the last moment will come for us some time or other, perhaps to-day or to-morrow), if, I say, we do think of dying, then it is certain that we must leave this world poor and needy; we shall be stripped bare and naked; none of all the things that we now love so earnestly and seek so greedily outside of our God and heavenly things will go with us out of this world. Alas! and what is to become of our wealth and money, that we have amassed with such labor and toil? What of our pleasures, the delights and joys in which we placed our sole consolation? What of those whom we loved so foolishly; for whose sake we so often offended God, and gave up our soul, heaven, and everything? Alas! all this will be taken from us on the bed of death! These garments shall be stripped from us completely; these creatures we love so tenderly must bid us an eternal adieu! Oh, what bitterness and pain will thus be caused to him who has set his heart too much on such goods!

And how widely different will then be the judgment formed of the vain happiness of the world! Then we shall, as it were, be awakened out of a dream, and find nothing left of all the things we hitherto had in our possession. Sometimes a poor man dreams during the night that he has found a great sum of money;

stripped of all.

Then we shall know the vanity of earthly goods.

how rejoiced he is thereat in his sleep! He has then far more pleasure than a rich man with all his splendor; he counts his money, and the more he reckons the more he finds, so that he cannot come to the end of it. In a word, no one is more happy or fortunate than he. But how long does his joy last? No longer than his dream; when he awakens and looks for his money, it vanishes; his former joy is turned into sorrow; he is and remains the poor man he always was. My dear brethren, we have such dreams as long as we live; but when our sleep is at an end, when the hour of death comes, when the words, "depart, Christian soul," resound in our ears, then our eyes are opened, and we see that our hands are empty, as the Prophet David says: "All the foolish of heart were troubled. They have slept their sleep: and all the men of riches have found nothing in their hands."¹ For a few years (so we shall say in our troubled thoughts) I was in prosperity, I was rich and wealthy; now I am dying, and what have I of it all? It was a dream that has passed away. For a time I was great in the esteem of men, and held an honorable position; now I am dying, and what have I of it all? Alas! the dream is at an end! I have often delighted my senses, and enjoyed the love of creatures with carnal pleasures; what remains of all that now? It was an empty dream; it is all over; poor and naked I must go into the house of my eternity!

Further explained by an example.

St. Antoninus writes that Saladin, the conqueror of Asia, when on his death-bed, caused the sheet in which his body was to be wrapped after death to be brought in to him, and then he had it fixed to a long pole, and carried through the streets, those who carried it having to cry out aloud the words: Behold all that remains to the conqueror of the East! O ye avaricious men, what shall we be able to say of you when your end draws near? A wooden coffin that will be buried in the earth, that is all that will remain to that rich man, that luxurious woman: "They shall leave their riches to strangers: and their sepulchres shall be their houses forever."² Ye ambitious men, what will men be able to say of what shall remain to you? The empty sound of the funeral bell that tolls for your requiem; that is all that shall be left to you at the end: "Their memory hath perished with a noise."³

¹ Turbati sunt omnes insipientes corde. Dormierunt somnum suum, et nihil invenerunt omnes viri divitiarum in manibus suis.—Ps. lxxv. 6.

² Relinquent alienis divitias suas: et sepulchra eorum domus illorum in æternum.—Ibid. xlviii. 11, 12.

³ Perit memoria eorum cum sonitu.—Ibid. ix. 7.

It has vanished into thin air! Delicate voluptuaries, vain worldlings, intemperate, unchaste libertines! what shall men be able to say of you? Foulness and rottenness: these shall be the splendid relics you shall leave behind! "Thy carcass is fallen down: under thee shall the moth be strewed, and worms shall be thy covering."¹ Sinners who are now clothed with vices as with a garment, according to the saying of the prophet: "They are covered with their iniquity and their wickedness,"² alas, you will not be able to divest yourselves of this garment of shame, but death will leave it to you. Unless you now of your own accord get rid of it by true repentance, what will then remain to you? Nothing else but the robe of everlasting flames and eternal torments in hell.

Christians, no matter how things are with us, what will remain to us at the end? The grave, the tomb, oblivion. Meanwhile, as the body is thus stripped bare and naked, the poor soul has to appear quite unaccompanied, without any of the goods of this world, before the judgment-seat of God, and there will be said of her: behold the man and his works! Oh, wo to me, unhappy mortal, if I should then be without merit and good works! Wo to me for eternity, if I should be found covered with the hideous mantle of sin! Ah, then I could wish that I had devoted to God, to my soul, to heaven, the half, the quarter of the precious time, of the care, the labor I spent on temporal things and on my body; like that wealthy man of whom St. Vincent Ferrer says that in his last moments he said, sighing deeply: Ah, I have built many houses on earth; would that I had built even a small cell in heaven! I have adorned and decorated my body, that shall soon be the food of worms, with costly apparel; would to God that I had put on the garment of sanctifying grace and heavenly glory! I have striven so hard for the favor and esteem of men; would to God that I had been as diligent in seeking the grace and friendship of God!

Wo to us if we depart this life poor and naked in our souls.

How much better off then will be the poor, oppressed, and desolate servant of God, who is content in his poverty and patient under trial! With what comfort, consolation, and joy he will greet the approach of death, which can take nothing from him but the sad and gloomy-colored mantle of want with which

Comfort for poor, oppressed, and pious Christians.

¹ *Concidit cadaver tuum: subter te sternetur tinea, et operimentum tuum erunt vermes.*—*Is.* xiv. 11.

² *Operti sunt iniquitate et impietate sua.*—*Ps.* lxxii. 6.

he was covered in the eyes of the world! He too will awake as it were out of a deep sleep; but the end of his dream will be a pleasant one. If, as sometimes happens, one has an oppressive, troublesome nightmare, imagining, for instance, that he is falling from the top of a tower and about to break his neck; or that a murderer is holding a knife at his throat; or that he is on the point of being drowned; or that his house is on fire; that his wife or dear child is dead, etc. : what anguish and torment is his during his sleep! His suffering is so great that he often is forced to shout out aloud. But when he awakens, what happens? He rubs his eyes, and finds himself quite fresh and unhurt in his bed; then his heart is filled with joy, because it was but a dream that tortured him so. Thus as a pleasant dream causes sadness on awakening, so a troublesome one brings joy and gladness. Oh, then, ye poor, oppressed, and desolate servants of God, be comforted! Be not afraid of your miseries; they are but a dream that will soon come to an end; and with what intense joy of heart you will open your eyes when the dream shall have vanished! I have for a time, you will think, suffered hunger and sorrow; now I am dying, and what remains to me? Even as much as to others who have lived in luxury, and eaten and drunk of the best. God be praised, the dream is at an end! I have been despised, persecuted, abandoned; now I am dying, and what have I now? The very same that others have who lived in splendor, pomp, and pleasure. The dream is over! I have been tried by all kinds of sickness and pain; now I am dying, and what have I? Even as much as if I had been always strong and healthy. The dream is over; all misery is at an end, and I have no more to suffer. Nay, this very poverty and want, this contempt and desolation, this pain and sickness, since I received them willingly from the hand of God, and bore them patiently for His sake, serving Him faithfully meanwhile, even those very things bring me now to the everlasting joys of heaven, where I shall be resplendent forever with the chosen children of God, clad with the robe of glory; while others who had a short dream of happiness and enjoyment during life shall lose it all at once, and unless they have made things right with God, shall be hurled into eternal torments.

**Exhortation
and purpose
to despise
earthly
goods, and**

My dear brethren, I close this first point and repeat: all of us must die poor and naked with the poor and naked Jesus. We hear this, and acknowledge it to be true; why then should we be so eager in the search after the transitory goods of earth, as if we

could possess them for a whole eternity? Why should we fear, not to offend God for the sake of them. abhor, bewail so bitterly the short-lived and most advantageous poverty and temporal adversity sent us by our well-meaning God, as if we had to bear it for a whole eternity? Why do we love earthly goods more than our soul and its salvation, more than Jesus our Saviour and God; for we often do not hesitate to despise God and His commandments for the sake of them? Away rather with all the frippery of the world, if it should keep me from saving my soul, from loving my Saviour as I ought! Better for me now to clothe the poor and naked Jesus in the persons of His poor and needy brothers and sisters, so that when the time comes in which I must and shall die poor and naked with the poor Jesus, although poor in earthly things, I may be rich in merits, and to the great comfort and pleasure of my soul may enter into everlasting joys. Above all shall this be my firm resolution: no good, nor joy, nor mortal, no matter who it or he may be, shall I ever so love as in the least to transgress the law of God, to afflict my Redeemer, to make the hour of my death more troubled, and my salvation uncertain. Do Thou, O Jesus, who didst die poor and naked for us, confirm this purpose of mine, and, as I hope, of all present, by Thy grace. Amen.

“Crucifying Him, they divided His garments.” Mark there another circumstance of the death of Christ: crucifying Him. Not only was Jesus pleased to die in the utmost poverty, stripped of His garments, but He also died on the cross in the greatest agony. We too must live and die on the cross with Jesus; and we should willingly do so with all our hearts, partly for the sake of following His example, partly through pity for our suffering Lord. This is the second and longer point of our meditation.

Second Part.

“Crucifying Him;” so that they nailed Him to the cross? Jesus suffered terrible torments in His crucifixion. These words are few, but they mean a great deal. Consider now how the cruel soldiers forced down on the hard wood of the cross Our Lord, who was exhausted by the loss of blood, and sinking with fatigue; they seized the nails and hammer, and fastened to the cross those hands that made heaven and earth, those feet whose footstool is the world, and fastened them with such violence that the whole mountain re-echoed with the sound. What terrible agony Jesus must have suffered in this crucifixion, when the thick, cruel nails bored through bone and marrow, dragging

the flesh with them into the holes they made; when His limbs were dislocated, His nerves and muscles violently racked! What terrible and gaping wounds must have been made in hands and feet, when the heavy weight of a human body hanging on three or four nails was raised on high and then allowed to fall into the hole made for the cross! And how all His wounds were thus reopened, the chest violently strained, the different organs of the body tortured; the heart swollen and almost burst, the ribs distended, the joints dislocated, so that according to the Psalmist, speaking in the person of the Saviour, all the bones might be counted¹—in a word, how every part of His body that could feel pain was tortured, is more than I or any other man can adequately describe. Only try it; stick a needle or pin into your hand or foot, and see how soon the hand will be withdrawn, and how the foot will shrink from the pain. Then try to realize the fearful pain caused by the thick nails as they were slowly driven into Our Lord's hands and feet with repeated blows of the hammer; and yet that was but the beginning of His torments. Imagine now that you hear Him as He hangs on the cross, His eyes streaming with blood, and turned to us for the last time, sighing and moaning with a broken and pitiful voice the words of the Lamentations: "O all ye that pass by the way, attend and see if there be any sorrow like to My sorrow."²

And indeed every kind of pain that a man may suffer.

Ah, my dear brethren, how often are we ignorant even of what we are looking at, when we happen, in passing, to see an image of the crucifixion! How is that? Because we turn to Christ with open eyes indeed, but with closed hearts, and do not consider the inhuman torments and grèat agony He must have suffered on the cross. Hear then, O ye Christians! Catholics! ye poor and oppressed! ye sinners! "attend and see if there be any sorrow like to My sorrow." See and consider well whether there was ever any pain endured by any one in the world so great as My pains. Consider if there be any torment which I do not now feel and endure for your sake. The pains that a man may suffer are divided into three kinds, and can affect either the soul with anguish, fear, dismay, trouble, desolation; or the body with different pains and sickness; or our good name with shame, insult, calumny, ridicule, and disgrace. Attend and see. Consid-

¹ Dinumeraverunt omnia ossa mea.—Ps. xxi. 18.

² O vos omnes qui transitis per viam, attendite, et videte si est dolor sicut dolor meus.—Lam. i. 12.

er now, go through the wide world, and see if you can find any one who has ever suffered as much of these three sorts of afflictions as I, your sovereign God.

And in the first place consider the torments of the soul. Has any of you ever experienced sadness, melancholy, dryness of spirit, mental torment, anguish, and want of consolation? Let him now see whether all this can be compared to that deadly agony that I suffered, not only in the Garden, when the blood was forced from My veins, but with that which assails Me on the cross, and compels Me to cry out in the bitterness of My soul: “ My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?”¹ Sorrow for the loss of your worldly substance, or for the death of a friend, has often forced copious tears from your eyes, and made you quite inconsolable; attend and see; consider whether that sorrow can be compared with My sadness and affliction, which should in the course of nature have pierced My heart, had not My Godhead come to My aid by a miracle. My servant Job complained, as he sat on the dung-hill, that he was abandoned by all his friends in his misfortunes; many of you too complain that your friends are dead, that you are desolate widows and orphans. Attend and see; ah, consider whether I was not far worse off in this respect! Job had at least three good friends who visited him and comforted him; no orphan or beggar child is so abandoned as not to find comfort and help somewhere in the world; but I am hanging on the cross, and have neither man nor angel; not a soul in heaven or on earth from whom I may expect the least comfort in My sufferings: “ I looked for one that would grieve together with Me, but there was none, and for one that would comfort Me, and I found none.”² My friends hid away from Me; My disciples abandoned Me; the robbers, My companions in death, blaspheme Me; the passers-by shake their heads with mockery against Me; the high-priests laugh and jeer at Me; My Mother alone and My beloved disciple stand at the foot of My cross, and by the sorrow they feel add to the torments that wring My compassionate heart. Nay, I am completely abandoned, even by My heavenly Father Himself. And what torments Me worst of all, and makes Me quite inconsolable, is this: that I foresee the little profit that ungrateful men will derive from My sufferings, and how most of them will de-

In His soul
the greatest
sadness and
anguish.

¹ Deus meus, Deus meus, ut quid dereliquisti me?—Matt. xxvii. 46.

² Sustinui qui simul contristaretur, et non fuit; et qui consolaretur, et non inventi.—Ps. lxxviii. 21.

liberately wallow in the most abominable vices, and descend into hell like flakes of snow falling on the earth in winter.

In His good
name the
greatest
disgrace.

“Attend and see if there be any sorrow like to My sorrow.” Consider the torments and insults offered to My honor and good name. Reflect and see whether any shame or confusion be like to Mine. David was cursed and pelted with stones by Semei, his subject; a great disgrace for a crowned king, but not to be compared to what I, the Son of the sovereign God, had to endure. “I am afflicted and humbled exceedingly.”¹ I hang here on the place of execution as the worst criminal of the whole world; between thieves, crowned with thorns as a fool, cried down as a blasphemer, a seducer of the people, a liar, a traitor, a drunkard, a sorcerer in league with the demon, “The reproach of men and the outcast of the people,”² as the very sweepings of the earth, not worthy of a place on it, “All they that saw Me have laughed Me to scorn.”³ Vah! exclaim the executioners and soldiers; vah! cry out the high-priests; vah! say the passers-by. Shame upon Thee; if Thou art the Son of God come down from the cross! He could save others, but Himself He cannot save, poor fool that He is! Now we see how He has deceived the world by His so-called miracles: “He shall be filled with reproaches.”⁴ So I have been satiated with insults. Come now, ye poor worms of earth, and bring forward your complaints! Your honor is interfered with by some talk; you cannot bear to see others preferred before you; if you only imagine that you are insulted by word or a jest, you wish to take up arms at once to revenge yourselves; is the shame you think you have to suffer greater than Mine? And if it is not a thousandth part so grievous, why do you complain and murmur, while I kept silence under the insults heaped upon Me, although I could easily have shown them who I am?

In His body
the greatest
torments.

Attend and see: consider finally the pains of the body, and see whether any one has suffered as I have. If you have ever felt a headache, then think of what Mine must have been when the thorns pierced through skin and bone to the very brain, and were driven still farther in by the wood of the cross. Do you know what it is to suffer pain in the eyes? See how Mine are drowned in a torrent of blood. Does any one know what an intolerable pain toothache is? Let him look at My cheeks stil

¹ Afflictus sum, et humiliatus sum nimis.—Ps. xxxvii. 9.

² Opprobrium hominum et abjectio plebis.—Ibid. xxi. 7.

³ Omnes videntes me deriserunt me.—Ibid. 8.

⁴ Saturabitur opprobriis.—Lam. iii. 30.

swollen and blue from the buffets and blows I received until My teeth were almost shattered. Does any one know what a pain in the hand or the foot is? Let him consider Mine pierced by the blunt nails and fastened to the cross. Are hunger and thirst an intolerable torment? See what they gave Me as food and drink: "They gave Me gall for My food; and in My thirst they gave Me vinegar to drink."¹ Point, if you can, to a single finger's breadth in My body, from head to foot, that is not mangled and torn and streaming with blood. There is not a sound part in Me; so that I am more like a butchered animal or a trodden worm than a man: "I am a worm, and no man."² What more can or shall I do for thee, O human soul? "What is there that I ought to do more?"³ Canst thou imagine anything that I can still suffer, besides what I have already suffered? If so tell Me, I am ready; I have nothing more left but a handful of blood in My heart, and this shall soon be poured out; My spirit is already hovering on My lips, and that too I will give up for thee.

"Have pity on Me, have pity on Me,"⁴ that is all I ask of you. **The thought of this should make sinners repent.**
O sinners! O Christians! O mortals for whom I have suffered all this, I beg of you as a last favor in return for My love, "have pity on Me," and do not any longer add to My pains and sufferings by your sins! If you do not love Me, then at least cease tormenting Me! Ah, dear Lord, no more! I cannot go any further! Sinners, what think you of this? Can you, as you meditate on this incomprehensible agony and death of your Lord, your Saviour, your God, can you still refuse to be moved to pity, that is, to detest your sins and amend your wicked lives? Can you still take a pleasure in sinning, and thus adding to the pains endured by Him who was wounded for our transgressions? Ah, human heart, is it possible? When Benadad, the king of Syria, was conquered by Achab, the king of Israel, and put to flight, with the view of appeasing the conqueror he sent to him some of his chief men clad in sackcloth, with ropes round their necks, who had to crawl before him on their hands and knees; this sight moved Achab to pity, and he granted them and their king the desired peace. Sinners, if this self-humiliation was sufficient to excite the compassion of an angry king, what heart can be so hard and inhuman as not to be moved to pity and repentance by

¹ Dederunt in escam meam fel; et in siti mea potaverunt me aceto.—Ps. lxxviii. 22.

² Ego autem sum vermis, et non homo.—Ibid. xxi. 7.

³ Quid est quod debui ultra facere?—Is. v. 4.

⁴ Miseremini mei, miseremini mei.—Job xix. 21.

the sight and consideration of the tragic spectacle presented this day on Calvary, where God Himself is dying on the cross in the utmost agony? But alas! how few there are who take any notice of Him? "They have added to the grief of My wounds,"¹ sighs the Lord by the Prophet David; they only laugh at My torments, and add fresh ones to them; all the poison and gall of their evil desires they cast upon Me; I may suffer as much as I can and will, yet there is no end of My passion, because they make no end of their sins; every hour they give Me new cause to suffer. "Crucifying again to themselves the Son of God,"² and making a mockery of Him. But wo to the blind and hardened man who is not moved to amend his life by the meditation of the bitter death of Jesus Christ!

And the oppressed bear their sufferings with patience.

In the next place, the mournful voice of the Saviour dying on the cross in extreme agony speaks to you, poor, afflicted, troubled, and oppressed Christians: "Have pity on Me, at least you My friends."³ I can find no comfort from sinners, who are the most numerous amongst men. Have pity on Me, then, you My dear friends, My companions in My afflictions, whom I have chosen in preference to others to bear the cross after Me in suffering; for whom I have ordained a time of chastisement here, that I may raise you all the higher in heaven with Myself hereafter. Have pity on Me; give Me at least this comfort in the midst of My sorrows: whatever cross you are forced to bear, whether it be bodily sickness, hard labor, discomfort, uncharitable remarks affecting your good name, misfortunes in temporal matters, losses and want, daily sorrow and mental trouble, that in any case you cannot avoid, at least bear those things with and for Me with a good intention, resigning your will to that of your heavenly Father, who has ordained those trials for your good; bear them for My sake, for indeed it is a comfort to have a companion in suffering: "Have pity on Me, at least you My friends." My dear friends, have pity on Me in that way! Christians, what answer shall we make to this? Shall we refuse our agonizing, dying Saviour that consolation? Nay, to speak more truly, shall we not rather, by patiently bearing crosses and contradictions, seek comfort for ourselves with and from the crucified Jesus; instead of, by our unwillingness, or by murmurs and curses against those whom we

¹ Super dolorem vulnerum meorum addiderunt.—Ps. lxxviii. 27.

² Rursum crucifigentes sibi metipsos Filium Dei.—Heb. vi. 6.

³ Misereamini mei saltem vos amici mei.—Job xix. 21.

imagine to be the authors of those trials, or by being dissatisfied with our well-meaning God, or by despair and down-heartedness, making our troubles worse, depriving them of all merit, and bearing the cross compulsorily like Simon; thus hanging on our cross like the impenitent thief, who blasphemed Christ, and from his cross, from the very side of Our Lord, descended into hell with the demons? God keep us from such folly and desperation!

Once for all, Jesus our Model, whom we must seek to resemble, was pleased not to live or die otherwise than on the cross: "Becoming obedient unto death; even to the death of the cross."¹ If we wish to live and die with Christ, and with Christ to enter heaven, then we must necessarily live with Christ, and die on the cross; and wo to him who has no cross to bear after Christ! For if the innocent Son of God had to enter by the cross into His heavenly glory, and that too by such a bitter and painful one, how can we, His sinful members, ever dream or entertain the slightest hope of finding a more comfortable way thither? No; that is impossible. There is, says St. John Chrysostom, no medium between paradise and the cross.² And there can be no doubt of this, for Our Lord Himself confirms it: "He that taketh not up his cross, and followeth Me, is not worthy of Me."³ This may well dismay and terrify the delicate children of the world, who, although they generally live in all kinds of sin, yet try or wish to have everything arranged for their comfort and according to their will, and look on the least difficulty as intolerable, and fly and shun the cross as worse than the demon himself, while they constantly pamper their bodies and indulge their senses, thus seeking their enjoyment in this life, while they desire to possess heaven in the next. Ah, vain is their hope! They must perforce choose one of the two things, since Jesus has died on the cross; either the temporal, or the eternal cross.

And finally, supposing that it was not necessary to bear the cross in order to go to heaven, suppose that we could avoid as we please all difficulty and contradiction, and that it lay in our power to live in all sorts of delights (Christians, when I use that word, I sufficiently explain what I allude to); I repeat, if that choice were given us, should we make it, seeing as we do our sovereign Lord and Saviour hanging on the cross in the greatest

For we cannot go to heaven without the cross.

And we have reason to be ashamed of our love of comfort, since Christ was so afflicted.

¹ Factus obediens usque ad mortem; mortem autem crucis.—Phillip. ii. 8.

² Inter crucem et paradisum nullum medium est.

³ Qui non accipit crucem suam et sequitur me, non est me dignus.—Matt. x. 38.

agony, and hearing Him inviting us to bear the cross with Him? Truly he would be a strange sort of servant who would demand, when on a journey he comes to an inn, the most delicate viands and costly wines, and a soft feather bed, while his prince or king in the very same inn has to be content with a crust of bread and to repose on a handful of straw. Strange would be that servant who would wish his master to toil and work while he reclines on a soft cushion, and desires others to wait upon him. What a shame and disgrace for a Christian, if the Almighty God could reproach him and say: Sit down, My servant; I will do the work, and wait on you; do you sleep comfortably till daylight: I must have a hard piece of wood for a pillow; do you enjoy yourself, and seek your comfort: to Me belong the scourges, nails, and bloody sweat; do you eat and drink to satiety: gall and vinegar shall be My food and drink; do you curl your hair and crown yourself with roses: sharp thorns are good enough for My head; do you laugh, joke, and dance: I will be sorrowful even to death; poverty, sickness, persecution, disgrace, and trouble are painful to you; such things are not suited to your delicate constitution: leave them then to Me, your Lord, I will bear them all for you; the cross is too heavy for you, you cannot carry it: I will live on the cross, and die on the cross for you, and hereafter you shall make merry with Me forever in heaven! Oh, what a disgrace such a reproach would be for a Christian and follower of Jesus Christ, my dear brethren!

Hence we should desire to suffer with Christ.

“I will not do this thing,” was the answer of the brave Urias, when David told him to go home and eat and drink and make himself comfortable after the fatigue of his journey. “My lord Joab and the servants of my lord abide upon the face of the earth: and shall I go into my house to eat and drink? By thy welfare and by the welfare of thy soul I will not do this thing.”¹ No, I cannot do it! So should every true Christian think in all circumstances of this life; my God hangs on the rugged cross, and shall I live in pleasure? My God hangs naked, poor, hungry and thirsty in the greatest agony on the cross; and shall I try to be free from all burdens and discomfort? “I will not do this thing.” No, my Lord, I am not better than Thou! my property, my honor, my body, my soul, my life, and my death

¹ Dominus meus Joab et servi domini mei super faciem terræ manent, et ego ingrediar domum meam, ut comedam et bibam? Per salutem tuam, et per salutem animæ tuæ, non faciam rem hanc.—II. Kings xi. 11.

must not seem to me more precious than Thine. If Thou canst live on the cross, I too can do the same with Thy help; if Thou wilt hang on the cross till the end of Thy life, so will I too, at least as long as is pleasing to Thee! Take away heaven and hell at the same time; if I had no reward to hope for, no punishment to fear in case I do not live on the cross in this life, nay, if without the cross I could have a higher place in heaven: yet if I have only a spark of right feeling left, the mere example of my great, infinite, and crucified God should be enough to make me look on it as the greatest honor and reward to be able to suffer trials and contradictions with God and for the love of God. Because it is honor enough for the servant to be like his master, as Christ said to comfort His disciples when telling them of the persecutions that were in store for them: "It is enough for the disciple that he be as his master; and the servant as his lord."¹ As if He wished to say: My dear disciples, when you are hated, banished, persecuted, scourged, martyred, put to death by the world, think of Me; they did the same to Me. It is good enough for you if you are worthy to suffer what I, your Lord and Master, have suffered. Oh, what comfort and joy this example of their crucified Master afterwards caused His disciples and their successors! "They went from the presence of the council rejoicing," says the Scripture of them, "that they were accounted worthy to suffer reproach for the name of Jesus."² It is the same example that mitigated and sweetened the torments and pains of the martyrs, so that they went to the torture as gaily as to a wedding-feast. "Why should we fear the gibbet?" exclaimed Lambertus, burgomaster of Haarlem, when the Dutch Calvinists were leading him to the gallows; "for if they crucified the Lord of glory, what have we His servants to expect?"

O poor, oppressed Christians who are crucified by contradictions of various kinds in this life, let the same example be your constant comfort and encouragement in all your calamities, according to the consoling words of the Apostle: "Looking on Jesus, the Author and Finisher of faith, who having joy set before Him, endured the cross, despising the shame."³ If it is hard to live in poverty, secret want, sickness, persecution, contempt,

Exhortation
to suffer
patiently.

¹ Sufficit discipulo ut sit sicut magister ejus; et servo, sicut dominus ejus.—Matt. x. 25.

² Ibant gaudentes a conspectu concilii, quoniam digni habiti sunt pro nomine Jesu contumeliam pati.—Acts v. 41.

³ Aspicentes in auctorem fidei et consummatorem Jesum, qui proposito sibi gaudio sustinuit crucem, confusione contempta.—Heb. xii. 2.

and much affliction, take the crucifix in your hands and fix your eyes on it! Let us say to ourselves, exclaims St. Augustine: "If He suffered that, what should not I suffer?"¹ If my God hangs on the cross, why should not I too be resigned to a much smaller one? If my Lord and God hung so patiently on such a painful cross, why should I feel downcast at the weight of mine, which is only a cross of straw, as it were, compared to His? If my Lord and God bore the thick and blunt nails, why should I not be patient under the prick of a needle? If my suffering and sorrow has lasted for many years, it has not yet lasted till death! My Lord and my God dies on the cross, although He could easily have saved Himself from it; and He remained on it for the love of me until death; if He did that, why should not I suffer after His example as long as is pleasing to Him?

After the example of pious Christians.

Such was the answer given by that pious woman of whom I think I told you on a former occasion; after she had been suffering from a long illness, a friend held the crucifix before her, and asked her to pray that the Lord might at last free her from her sufferings. What! exclaimed the sick woman, how could I be so shameless as to make such a request of the Lord whom I behold hanging on the cross, who suffered so much for my sake, and did not ask to be freed from His torments, although He was not in want of me, nor was He obliged to suffer the death of the cross? And shall I not willingly bear pain for His sake? Or must I ask Him to free me from it? Far be that from me! Willingly will I suffer as long as is pleasing to God, for the sake of Him who suffered for me, even to death. Truly a heroic answer! Oh, would to God that this woman had all those who are afflicted as imitators of her heroic patience!

Even if we have to suffer unjustly.

And if some are innocently and unmeritedly oppressed and tormented by others, let them take the crucifix and look on Jesus! He will at once answer in thought, as He formerly did to the holy martyr Peter. This holy man was condemned by his superiors to prison for some fault of which he was innocent; when locked up in his cell he threw himself on his knees before the crucifix, and complained and sighed: Lord, said he, Thou knowest my innocence; why am I so unjustly detained in this prison? And I, Peter, he heard in answer, why am I so unjustly nailed to this cross? This was enough to make the holy man ashamed of his complaints. Complain then, if you wish, O faint-hearted

¹ *Dicamus nobis: si ille, quid nos?*

Christian, about the misfortune you have suffered; about your poverty, misery, sickness, trials; say that great injustice has been done you; but be ashamed of yourself at the same time, when you see Jesus hanging on the cross, and imagine He is saying to you too: And I, O Christian, why am I nailed to this cross? What harm have I done? Whom have I injured that I should be fastened to this painful gibbet, and that I should remain on it till death?

Oh, truly, as far as I am concerned, I must be covered with confusion when I look at Thee, my crucified and dying God! Thou, my sovereign Lord, art hanging on the cross amidst jeers and mockery; for me, a poor worm of earth, it is a cross if I am not respected, honored, and looked up to by all! Thou, my God, hangest on the cross, pierced with nails and thorns; and I, Thy worthless creature, esteem it as a cross not to find my comfort in everything! Thou, my Saviour, hangest on the cross in the bitterest poverty; and I complain of my lot if I cannot live in luxury! Thou, O Lord, hangest on the cross with gall and vinegar as Thy food and drink; and I, a poor sinner, think one fast day too severe! Thou, my Saviour, hangest on the cross wounded and mangled over Thy whole body; and I, Thy wicked servant, howl and scream if the least hurt is offered to my senses! Thou, my Jesus, hangest on the cross abandoned by Heaven and earth; while I cannot bear the cross that comes from the death of a friend! Thou, O innocent Lord, diest on the cross for love of me; and what return have I made Thee therefor? What am I still doing for love of Thee? Ah, shame upon me! I have by my sins nailed Thee again to the cross; I am guilty of Thy painful death; I am Thy murderer, and therefore I cannot deny that I have often deserved the pains of hell! Ah, pardon me! I am sorry! I readily confess with the penitent thief: "We indeed justly, for we receive the due reward of our deeds."¹ Thou art innocent; Thou hast done, Thou canst do, no evil; while all the pains of the world are not enough to punish my sins adequately. Oh, why then have I been so discontented, so inclined to murmur against Thee when Thou hast sent me the cross? I should have rather sought consolation from Thee. O suffering Jesus, and then would my troubles have become lighter. But alas! I have not done so; but rather made my trials greater, nay, deserved a worse punishment in the next life by my impatience, my unruly imagination, my despairing thoughts. Henceforward, dearest Lord, Thou

Conclusion
and purpose
to suffer
with Christ.

¹ Nos quidem juste, nam digna factis recipimus.—Luke xxiii. 41.

shalt be my only comfort in all my troubles; with Thy cross will I sweeten and alleviate all that has hitherto seemed intolerable to me. No matter how much I may have to endure, I am sure that my sufferings shall not be nearly as great as Thine. With St. Lawrence Justinian I say: "Nothing else do I desire in this life but to be always crucified with Thee."¹ Send me, O Lord, what cross and in what manner Thou wilt; let it last as long as Thou wilt; I will live on the cross with Thee till death; if Thou wilt, I will be poor with Thee till death; if Thou wilt, I will be sorrowful and desolate with Thee till death; if Thou wilt, I will be contemned and despised with Thee till death; if Thou wilt, I will endure pain with Thee till death; by the cross I must and will enter with Thee into eternal joys. Amen.

THIRTEENTH SERMON.

**ON THE STRICT JUSTICE OF GOD DISPLAYED IN THE
DEATH OF JESUS.**

Subject.

Jesus has given up the ghost: never has the justice of God displayed greater strictness than in this death!—*Preached on Good Friday.*

Text.

Et inclinato capite, tradidit spiritum.—John xix. 30.

"And bowing His head, He gave up the ghost."

Introduction.

When St. Gregory was about to write of the penitent sinner Magdalene, he began with these words: "When I think of the repentance of Mary Magdalene, I am more inclined to weep than to say anything."² "For whose heart, even if made of stone, would not be softened by the tears of that sinner?"³ Ah, my dear brethren, what are the tears of a Magdalene compared to the tragedy offered to our consideration by this great day of sorrow? A God doing penance in the garb of a sinner! A God shedding, not only tears, but blood! A God sorrowful even to death, and, as it were, drowned in a sweat of blood! A God laden

¹ Nihil aliud peto in hac vita, nisi ut semper sim tecum crucifixus.

² Cogitant mihi de Mariæ Magdalene pœnitentia, flere magis libet, quam aliquid dicere.—S. Greg. Hom. 33. in Evang.

³ Cujus enim vel saxeam pectus illæ hujus peccatricis lachrymæ non emolliant?

with chains like a robber or murderer! A God mocked as a fool! A God insulted by buffets and blows! A God scourged with rods and whips! A God crowned with thorns! A God accused, sentenced, and condemned for and by men! A God fastened to a gibbet with nails through His hands and feet! A God put to death on the cross like a criminal! This is the matter that to-day suggests itself to me to offer for your consideration. With much more reason than can and must I use the words of St. Gregory: "I am more inclined to weep than to say anything." Am I then more insensible than the lifeless sun and stars that could not bear to look on that sight, but hid themselves away in a garb of mourning? Am I harder than the stones and rocks that trembled and burst into pieces? Am I more cruel than the demons in hell, who were stricken with fear and dismay? Am I so obdurate that the contemplation of such a mystery has no power to move or soften me? The Catholic Church, which sympathizes in this general mourning of all nature at the death of the Creator, wishes to excite in her children on this day feelings of sorrow and compassion. She shows her grief by the silence of the bells; she sighs and moans in the words of the Lamentations of Jeremias; she hides her images and ornaments under veils; she rends, as it were, her garments in the stripping of the altars; she casts, so to speak, everything to the ground by the opening of the tabernacle and the cessation of the holy sacrifice of the Mass. Ah, truly, weeping is easier than speaking on such an occasion. Words cannot be found to express the emotions that such a tragic and awful mystery gives rise to. What is to be done, then, my dear brethren? We must imitate the friends of Job, when they saw him sitting on the dung-hill in the greatest agony; seven days and nights, says the Scripture, did they remain by him: "And no man spoke to him a word: for they saw that his grief was very great."¹ In the same way we shall to-day allow only our thoughts to work, and in silent meditation we shall contemplate the dying God in His last moments, for time will not suffer us to do more. I shall lead the way; follow me in your thoughts.

Plan of Discourse.

Jesus has given up the ghost: never did the justice of God make more display of its strictness than in this death! Such is the whole subject.

¹ Et nemo loquebatur ei verbum: videbant enim dolorem esse vehementem.—Job ii. 13.

O Mary, Mother of sorrows! and ye angels who wept bitterly at the death of your Creator! obtain for us all a salutary fear of the divine justice, a true repentance for our sins, on account of which Jesus had to die.

The sentence pronounced by the Eternal Father on His Son seems unjust.

So that Jesus had to give up the ghost and die? Truly a severe punishment! a judgment without mercy! If I pass its circumstances rapidly before my mind, I should be tempted to reverse my first opinion, and to say: never has the world seen a greater injustice than in this event. Because to condemn to death, and to a violent, painful death, an innocent man who never did the least wrong; and that without trial, without giving him any opportunity of defending or exculpating himself, and without leaving him the least comfort: is that right? And yet that is the way in which Jesus was dealt with on this day; and, what at first sight seems incomprehensible to me, that sentence was spoken against Him by Heaven itself, and by the same power carried into execution.

For He was condemned to death after having given Himself up altogether to the divine vengeance.

With regard to the death inflicted on Him, could it well be more severe or more cruel? I will not dwell on what preceded it. For Christ had offered Himself completely, and given Himself over as a victim of the divine vengeance. There was no perfection in His Godhead which He did not, as it were, devote; no part in His humanity which He did not offer, to pains and suffering. His immortality He had, so to speak, sacrificed, when He became a mortal man subject to human infirmities; His omnipotence, when He allowed Himself to be bound with ropes and chains in the Garden of Gethsemani, and led away as a prisoner; His wisdom, when He was held as a fool in the court of Herod, and treated as one out of his right senses; His holiness, when He put on the appearance of a sinner, and was decried as a sorcerer, as one who wrought miracles by virtue of a secret understanding with the devil; His infinite knowledge, when they bandaged His eyes in the house of the high-priest Caiphas, and after having cruelly buffeted Him, said to Him in mockery: Prophecy, O Christ, who has struck Thee? His infinite majesty and glory, when in the court of Pilate's house they put a reed in His manacled hands, and clothed Him with a torn garment instead of the royal purple, and laughed at Him as a mock king; His honor and good name, when overwhelmed with contumely of all sorts, He was held up to public contempt as a seducer, a drunkard, a wretch possessed by the devil; His justice, when

contrary to all justice He was held in lower estimation than a murderer; His goodness and mercy, when by His countless benefits He drew down on Himself the envy, the plottings and persecutions of the high-priests. He had already given up all the powers of His soul; His memory, which during His whole life continually represented in lively colors the sufferings that were in store for Him; His understanding, by which He foresaw the little profit most men would derive from His passion; His will, by the inexpressible sadness, grief, and anguish that oppressed Him to such an extent as almost to deprive Him of life. He had already given up all the members of His body, not one of which from head to foot was sound or uninjured, or without its particular torment. His head was crowned with thorns, His hair torn out by the roots, His cheeks bleeding and livid, His face covered with spittle, His eyes swimming with blood, His ears filled with blasphemies and imprecations, His mouth and tongue tortured with thirst and with the gall and vinegar they gave Him to drink, His neck and arms bound with ropes, His shoulders bruised by the heavy weight of the cross, His hands and feet pierced by the nails, His whole body torn by the scourges, His nerves violently racked, His joints dislocated, His blood poured out to the last drop, His strength completely exhausted.

O just God! if Thy Son had to be thus chastised, was not this enough for Him to suffer? No; the divine justice was not yet satisfied; there was still something left, and it was the noblest, the most precious thing that God had yet created; namely the soul of Christ, that soul from which all souls must derive their supernatural life; this too was demanded of Him at the end. And therefore Jesus called out with a loud voice: Here Thou hast it in Thy hands; "He gave up the ghost." He was bound to obey His heavenly Father, and that even to death: "Becoming obedient unto death:" and to what kind of a death? Not to a common death, but to one by which thieves and robbers are wont to lose their lives, "even to the death of the cross;"¹ a death that in former times was looked on as the greatest and most severe punishment. To hang suspended by the arms with ropes for but one hour is such an intolerable torment that the worst criminals are thereby induced to confess their guilt, although they know that this concession will be followed by their death. What a terrible death it must then be to hang living for three whole hours, suspend-

And to a death terrible in all its circumstances.

¹ Factus obediens usque ad mortem; mortem autem crucis.—Philipp. ii. 8.

ed by nails to a cross, as was the case with Our Lord! Where, when, and how was this death inflicted? All its circumstances render it still more cruel and painful. The country in which it happened was Jerusalem, at that time the theatre, as it were, of the world, the seat of the true religion, the dwelling-place of the chosen people of God; so that there ought to be all the less doubt of the righteousness and justice of this execution. The place in which He died was Mount Calvary, the place of common execution, furnished with gibbets and wheels for those condemned to die. The time was that of the greatest festival of the Jews, namely, Easter-tide, in which countless numbers of people were wont to assemble from all parts; thus this disgraceful death was made known throughout the whole world. In the presence and before the eyes of this multitude, this little world, so to speak, Jesus hung on the cross in the full light of day, naked, between two thieves, and gave up the ghost. See how Jesus had to die, and how He had to pay the strict justice of God!

Although He was perfectly innocent, and had done no wrong.

And why? What wrong had He done? Terrible must have been the crime that drew down such a chastisement! In former times there was seen in the same country, climbing up the Mount of Olives, David flying from his son in wretched array: "David went up by the ascent of Mount Olivet, going up and weeping, walking barefoot, and with his head covered."¹ Truly a lamentable sight to behold such a great king walking barefoot, and reduced to such a miserable plight that all the help he could expect from his own servants was the tear of sympathy! But David, who knew well the cause of his misfortunes, for he remembered the grievous sins he had committed—his adultery with Bethsabee, the murder of Urias,—bewailed not only his miseries, but especially the sins he had been guilty of, and the scandal he had given. Therefore he prayed humbly to his God who was taking vengeance on him, of whose goodness he had rendered himself unworthy, and who now gave him up as a rebel to the anger, wrath, and disobedience of his own subjects. But Thou, O innocent Jesus! what harm hadst Thou done to be so bitterly persecuted by Thy own people, nay, to be so sharply chastised by Thy heavenly Father Himself? Let me ask with Pilate, O Jewish people! "What evil hath He done?"² Before that, they had

¹ David ascendebat clivum Olivarum, scandens et flets, nudis pedibus incedens, et operto capite.—II. Kings xv. 30.

² Quid enim mali fecit?—Matt. xxvii. 23.

heard that "He hath done all things well: He hath made both the deaf to hear and the dumb to speak;"¹ the sick He restored to health, the blind to sight. He passed through our towns and cities and left nothing but benefits behind Him: "Who went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him."² Did He deserve the gallows, death, on that account? Ye pharisees and high-priests, when assembled in council in order to find some charge against Christ, what did you bring Him in guilty of? "What evil hath He done?" "This man doth many miracles,"³ they say. Is that all? Yes; nor could they find any other charge against Him; for long before Our Lord Himself had challenged them, saying: "Which of you shall convince Me of sin?"⁴ And they remained dumb, and had not a word to say. O Judas! what evil hath He done that you delivered Him over to the judges and sold Him? Ah, I have done wrong! "I have sinned in betraying innocent blood."⁵ Ye false witnesses who accused the Lord, say "what harm hath He done?" They bring forward lies enough against Him; but, as the Scripture says, "their evidence were not agreeing."⁶ Answer then, O blood-stained judge, Pilate, "what harm hath He done," although you pronounce sentence of death on Him? "I find no cause in Him."⁷ And three successive times does he give the same testimony. Ye thieves who were companions of His death, what evil hath the Man done who hung between you on the cross? "We indeed justly, for we receive the due reward of our deeds: but this Man hath done no evil."⁸ Tell us then Thyself, O Lord! perhaps Thou art conscious of some secret crime? "I do always the things that please Him."⁹ Hear, O heavenly Father, the innocence of Thy Son confirmed by His worst enemies, and even by His very judge! Why hast Thou then allowed Him to be so cruelly done to death? "What evil hath He done?" Hast Thou not also given testimony to His innocence, and said: "This is My

¹ Bene omnia fecit: et surdos fecit audire et mutos loqui.—Mark vii. 37.

² Pertransiit benefaciendo, et sanando omnes oppressos a diabolo, quoniam Deus erat cum illo.—Acts x. 38.

³ Hic homo multa signa facit.—John xi. 47.

⁴ Quis ex vobis arguet me de peccato?—Ibid. viii. 46.

⁵ Peccavi, tradens sanguinem justum.—Matt. xxvii. 4.

⁶ Convenientia testimonia non erant.—Mark xiv. 56.

⁷ Nullam invenio in eo causam.—John xviii. 38.

⁸ Nos quidem juste, nam digna factis recipimus: hic vero nihil mali gessit.—Luke xxiii. 41.

⁹ Ego quae placita sunt ei, facio semper.—John viii. 29.

178 *Justice of God Displayed in the Death of Jesus.*

beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased"?¹ Meanwhile the innocent Saviour, condemned to the death of the cross, must sigh forth like Job on the dung-hill: "I have not sinned, and my eye abideth in bitterness."² I have not sinned, and yet I must close My sorrowful, blood-stained eyes on the gibbet of the cross!

Nor did He get a hearing, or a chance of defence either, from His human judges.

And not alone must Jesus die innocent, which is hard enough; but He is not even allowed a chance of excusing or defending Himself, either before a human or a divine tribunal; a privilege that is not denied, according to worldly justice, even to the worst criminal. A murderer, an assassin, a robber of churches, a scoundrel is allowed to have an advocate to plead for him, although his cause is unjust, and to defend him, if any defence is possible; but Jesus alone finds no friend, no angel in heaven, no man on earth to say a single word in His behalf. Then perhaps He will be permitted to plead His own cause? For, as Nicodemus asked with reason: "Doth our law judge any man, unless it first hear him?"³ But no; even this is denied to Christ. For first of all He was asked to give an account of His doctrine and His disciples; but hardly had He opened His lips to give a meek answer, when behold, "one of the servants standing by gave Jesus a blow, saying: Answerest Thou the high-priest so?"⁴ What a gross injustice! If they did not wish to listen to Him, why did they ask Him a question? On another occasion He was asked: "Art Thou the Son of God?" And He answered meekly: "Thou hast said it."⁵ Hear, exclaimed the high-priest at once: "He hath blasphemed; what further need have we of witnesses? Behold, now you have heard the blasphemy: what think you? But they answering, said: He is guilty of death."⁶ What is He to do then? Hold His tongue? Yes; and He did so: "Jesus held His peace."⁷ But alas! because He keeps silent, He is looked on by some as a fool, by others as a criminal who confesses His own guilt, and therefore He is condemned to death. What a wretched parody of justice, in which the accused is not allowed to speak, and is condemned because he keeps silent!

¹ Hic est Filius meus dilectus, in quo mihi bene complacuit?—Matt. xvii. 5.

² Non peccavi, et in amaritudinibus moratur oculus meus.—Job xvii. 2.

³ Numquid lex nostra judicat hominem, nisi prius audierit ab ipso?—John vii. 51.

⁴ Unus assistens ministrorum dedit alapam Jesu, dicens: Sic respondes pontifici?—Ibid. xviii. 22.

⁵ Tu dixisti.—Matt. xxvi. 64.

⁶ Blasphemavit: quid adhuc egemus testibus? Ecce nunc audistis blasphemiam: quid vobis videtur? At illi respondentes dixerunt: Reus est mortis.—Ibid. 65, 66.

⁷ Jesus autem tacebat.—Ibid. 63.

Now since there is no justice or mercy for Him amongst men, do Thou, O Father of mercy in heaven, at least take up the cause of Thy innocent Son! But no, not even there can He find a hearing. Did He not most fervently implore one before, and was He not refused? Come with me for a moment in thought, my dear brethren, to the Garden of Gethsemani; see there the poor and sorrow-stricken Son of God lying prostrate on His face, turning His bloodshot eyes down to earth and up to heaven: "My Father," He says, "if it be possible, let this chalice pass from Me."¹ My Father, He repeats for the second and third time, if it be possible! How, dear Lord, dost Thou pray so fervently, and hast Thou still a doubt as to whether Thou shalt be heard? Hast Thou then deceived us when Thou saidst: "Ask and you shall receive:"² nothing is impossible to My Father? Had He no angels to send to defend and save Thee? He had an angel to send to the lions' den at the prayer of Daniel. He had an angel to rescue Lot from the flames of Sodom; an angel to protect the three youths in the fiery furnace; an angel to save Ezechias from the hands of the Assyrians in answer to his prayer. Has He none for Thee? But what need is there for an angel? Can He not help Thee Himself, since Thou desirest it so eagerly? He daily hears the prayers and sighs of men, even of the greatest sinners. True, but He will not hear the prayers, the sighs, and the entreaties of His sorrowing Son. And therefore that Son resigns Himself fully into His Father's hands: "Not as I will, but as Thou wilt."³ Behold, here I am; torture, punish, kill Me as Thou wilt. Ah, and should not that humble submission and obedience have softened the Father's heart, especially as one sigh of Our Lord's is of infinite value, and more than sufficient to appease the divine justice? Oh, how often God shows this tenderness towards us sinners, when He withholds the threatened and already uplifted rod of chastisement, on seeing that we humbly acknowledge our fault and resign ourselves to His will! Abraham was ready to sacrifice his son Isaac, and behold this willingness on his part satisfied the Almighty God; He told him that He was content, that he should spare his son, and that his obedience was sacrifice enough. Has God then less pity and mercy for His own Son? So it is, my dear brethren,

Nor from
His heaven-
ly Father.

¹ *Pater mi, si possibile est, transeat a me calix iste.—Matt. xxvi. 30.*

² *Petite, et accipietis.—John xvi. 24.*

³ *Non sicut ego volo, sed sicut tu.—Matt. xxvi. 39.*

as we see to-day; there is mercy enough with God for men; but none for this Man who is at the same time God. Prayers and entreaties were of no avail; He was obliged to consummate the bloody sacrifice.

Besides, He had to die without any consolation.

Nor was the divine justice satisfied therewith. Innocent as the suffering Jesus was, unheard-of the bitterness of His death, He might at all events have had the consolation that is not denied to any sinner who is publicly executed, nor to the just in their last moments; for the former have the sympathy of others, the latter the testimony of their own conscience. The former have at least the pity of those who witness their execution, and that is some comfort for them; the latter have the sweet consolation in the midst of their torments, of remembering that they are innocent, and that they suffer for the cause of virtue and justice. Thus Andrew and many others went joyfully and gladly to meet their cross; Lawrence and many others were able to laugh and jest while on the glowing gridiron. But even this small comfort was denied to Jesus. No glad or consoling thought came into His mind to chase away the sadness of His soul; He felt nothing in His afflicted heart but sadness, fear, terror, death-anguish, and such an interior sadness, that the prophet says in His person: "The sorrows of hell encompassed me."¹ Outwardly God so allowed it, that not one of the executioners showed Him the least mercy, not one of the multitude that beheld His death the least pity, with the exception of His Mother and the few friends who by divine dispensation were utterly unable to help in any way. The executioners, as if they were possessed by the devil, were not content with inflicting on Him the death decreed by the judge; they invented one torture after another to make Him suffer all the more. After they had scourged all the flesh off His bones, they tried to torture His very entrails with the vinegar and gall; although a refreshing drink was not usually denied to any dying malefactor. They tore off His clothes and cast lots for them with every sign of savage joy, as if the Lord had been a plague in the land, and they hoped by His destruction to be freed from all evil; as if He were not worthy of the pity one might show to a beaten hound. The passers-by wagged their heads with blasphemies and taunts against Him: He saved others, now the poor fool cannot save Himself! If He be King of Israel, let Him come down from the cross, and we will believe in Him, etc. His dis-

¹ Dolores inferni circumdederunt me.—Ps. xvii. 6.

ciples and friends left Him; one of them sold Him, another betrayed Him; His Mother and the pious women, instead of comforting Him, only added to His sufferings by their sorrow. Heaven and earth were against Him; the one by terrible quaking and trembling, the other by lightnings and thunders; as if everything had conspired to increase His torments. He was abandoned by His heavenly Father as He hung on the cross, and so given over to the rage of His tormentors, as if He were not His Father's Son, and God no longer cared for Him. Hence the Almighty gave free rein to the cruelty of the Jews, and did not dispense Him from the least suffering, until all was fully accomplished. Nay, so great were His desolation and abandonment that, after having endured all the other tortures with the utmost meekness and patience, He could not at last restrain Himself, but cried out with a loud voice on the cross: "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?"¹ Thus in addition to His other sufferings, the Lord gave up the ghost exhausted by pain, without help or consolation.

Almighty God, I will no longer ask Thee where is Thy mercy, but rather where is Thy justice? Thy prophets have so often said: "Thou art just, O Lord: and Thy judgment is right;"² "Thou art just in all . . . and all Thy judgments true."³ Is this justice perhaps only for men, and not for Thy own Incarnate Son, since Thou allowest Him to be so foully treated? Or hast Thou perhaps had nothing to do with His death? Is it Judas, or Pilate, or the high-priests, or the executioners who are alone the cause of it? Truly they were the ministers and instruments who carried out the sentence; but who else gave them the power to do so, if not Thou, who hast all power in Thy hands? And did not Thy murdered Son say as much to Pilate? "Thou shouldst not have any power against Me unless it were given thee from above."⁴ Who poured out for Him the bitter chalice of suffering, and gave it Him to drink, if not Thou? "The chalice which My Father hath given Me."⁵ Thou art the only One to whom He was obedient till death. "Not as I will, but as Thou wilt." He resigned Himself perfectly to Thy will and decree. It was Thou, as the Apostle says, who thus didst present Jesus as a proof to the world of Thy strict justice: "Whom God hath

Thus the Divine Justice acted most severely to Him.

¹ Deus meus, Deus meus, ut quid dereliquisti me?—Matt. xxvii. 46.

² Justus es, Domine, et rectum iudicium tuum.—Ps. cxviii. 137.

³ Justus es in omnibus, et omnia iudicia tua vera.—Dan. iii. 27.

⁴ Non haberes potestatem adversum me ullam, nisi tibi datum esset desuper.—John xix. 11.

⁵ Calicem, quem dedit mihi Pater.—Ibid. xviii. 11.

proposed . . . to the showing of His justice.”¹ But is it justice thus to act towards one who is innocent?

But our
sins are the
cause of all
this, and
He offered
Himself to
pay for
them.

Let us, my dear brethren, cast down our eyes with the deepest reverence. Yes, O God! Thy judgment is right. Even this judgment, severe as it is, is and remains holy and just! Hear what the Lord says by the Prophet Isaias to me and to all who wonder thereat: “He was wounded for our iniquities, He was bruised for our sins. The Lord hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all. For the wickedness of My people have I struck Him.”² He who becomes bail for another must in justice render satisfaction in case the former cannot do so. Jesus is bail for all men, and has offered Himself to the Divine Justice to satisfy for the sins of the whole world; therefore He is obliged to pay all our debts to the last farthing. Oh, I repeat: truly, Lord, Thou art just, and Thy judgment is right! No longer, Pilate, shouldst thou ask: what hast Thou done? Rather ask thyself what thou hast done? Ask what have thy forefathers done? Ask what thy descendants will do? Ask me what I have done? If there were no other sins in the world but mine; if I had no other crime on my conscience but that which came to me from my forefather Adam, that alone would be enough to deliver Christ over to a painful death. But now “the Lord hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all.” All our past, present, and future sins. Count, if you can, all the injustices, impurities, adulteries, acts of revenge, curses, imprecations, and the other sins that have been committed from the beginning of the world; count, moreover, if you can see so far, all the sins that are committed by Turks, heathens, Jews, heretics, Christians, Catholics; count in addition all the sins that shall be committed till the end of the world. What a vast number of sins you would find in a single city in the space of one year! What a multitude of sins must then be committed in the whole world by all men from the beginning of the world till the end of it? Now Jesus, innocent as He is, has clothed Himself with all this filth voluntarily; this immense burden is laid altogether on His shoulders: “The Lord hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all.” The Saviour has undertaken to satisfy for all these sins. And now, Pilate, no longer hast thou reason to say: “I find no cause in Him,” but rather shouldst thou say:

¹ Quem proposuit Deus ad ostensionem justitiæ suæ.—Rom. iii. 25.

² Ipse autem vulneratus est propter iniquitates nostras, attritus est propter scelera nostra. Posuit Dominus in eo iniquitatem omnium nostrum. Propter scelus populi mei percussus eum.—Is. liii. 5, 6, 8.

I find great cause in Him why He should be guilty of death. And instead of saying, "Behold the Man," thou shouldst rather say: "Behold the Lamb of God; behold Him who taketh away the sins of the world!" For if one sin, if the eating of the apple in paradise is of such great malice that all men and angels together are unable to satisfy for it to the Divine Justice, even by enduring the pains of hell forever: have we reason to be astonished that He who was bail for all the sins of the world should be punished so severely and cruelly? A single drop of blood, one sigh or word of Jesus Christ, would have been more than enough to atone for an infinite number of sins; but God wished to accept no other atonement but the death of His Son. Therefore He refused to hear Him; therefore He dealt with Him mercilessly, and made Him drink the bitter chalice to the very dregs, to show us and impress deeply on our minds what we otherwise think so little of, and seek to palliate to ourselves, namely, the great evil that sin is, since to destroy it all the evils of the world are insufficient; and to blot it out the Almighty showed no mercy or grace to His own Son, although He had only the outward appearance and garb of a sinner, and became bail for our sins.

O sin, what a monster thou art! To understand thy malice I need no longer look up to heaven and see the multitude of angels that were precipitated into the abyss for one momentary thought; I need not look on the earth submerged in the deluge; I need not be surprised at the fate of Sodom and Gomorrha, reduced suddenly to ashes by a rain of fire; I need not descend into hell, there to consider the millions of lost souls who are burning for all eternity without hope of release in that lake of fire and brimstone. All I need do is to go in spirit to Mount Calvary, and there consider the innocent Son of God, so terribly torn and mangled for the sins of others, so cruelly punished by His heavenly Father, hanging there dead on a gibbet. This sight is far more terrible to me than hell with its torments; it shows me what I hardly seemed to grasp before, that it is a monstrous and incomprehensible evil to excite the anger of the great God. Are we not blind mortals to make so little of sin?

From this we see the great malice of sin.

Oh, how easily thou art committed even by men who have seen their God crucified and murdered on thy account! To break a window-pane and to commit a sin seem to be of equal importance to the majority of men. Nay, what do I say? A trivial

Which is yet so wantonly committed.

¹ Ecce Agnus Dei, ecce qui tollit peccatum mundi.—John 1. 29.

accident of the kind is enough to make men curse and swear, and so sin anew; while after their sins they can laugh and jest; aye, there are many who rejoice at offending God, who even live by it! Thieves and murderers, unjust business men and lawyers, and those wretches whom I dare not name: what else do they live by but offences against God? "They shall eat the sins of my people."¹ They make a business of sin, they eat and drink by sin, and they fear that if they led honest lives they would suffer hunger and poverty. Be amazed, O holy apostle St. Paul! who did not imagine it possible for a believing Christian to commit sin after the death of Christ; for you said that Christ died "for the remission of former sins."² O sinners! either we must amend our lives or give up our faith; for there is nothing more inconsistent than to believe that Christ died to satisfy for sin, and yet to sin on as easily as if the passion and death of the Son of God were a mere fable.

Sinners should be terrified by this proof of the strict justice of God.

O sin, at what a pitch of madness did I arrive when I committed thee so often, so wantonly! So that I am in the number of those who have cost the life of my God, who have added to His torments, and brought Him to a shameful death! Alas! what am I to do if so much is required for one sin; if the death of the Son of God is demanded for it, and that too for the sins of others? Oh, "it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God!"³ What are we to do, O sinners? Must we not despair? Can we dare to hope or to beg for grace from Him who stopped His ears against the cries of His own Son, and refused to show Him any grace or mercy? Will the wicked servant have a more favorable judgment and sentence to expect than the innocent Lord who was so cruelly done to death? Anguish, fear, and despair overwhelm me! O justice of God, I must exclaim with St. Augustine, "rush not in upon me, for I am not able to sustain thee!"⁴ I have millions of debt, and not a farthing wherewith to pay! Justice of God, rush not in upon me!

But they must have all the more hope if they wish to repent.

But why this fear and anguish? Why these miserable and despairing thoughts? Rather be comforted and consoled with me, O penitent sinners! For the Son of God, who was so cruelly treated, bore alone the whole weight of justice that He might leave only mercy for us, if we wish to be partakers thereof.

¹ Peccata populi mei comedent.—Osee iv. 8.

² Propter remissionem præcedentium delictorum.—Rom. iii. 25.

³ Horrendum est incidere in manus Dei viventis.—Heb. x. 31.

⁴ Justitia Dei, non irruas super me, quia non potero sustinere te.

To blot out all sin, even if our malice was equal to that of the demons, and for all of us to be eternally happy, provided we are only humbly repentant, the mere voice of His blood is enough. This blood cries out with a mighty voice to the Divine Justice: "Put up Thy sword into the scabbard;"¹ it cries out to the Father: "Father, forgive them!"² I have paid everything! It calls out to all sinners, no matter how wicked they are: "I desire not the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way, and live."³ What consolation and hope for the sinner! O my God! when I consider the multitude and malice of my sins, the vileness of my being, and the greatness of Thy majesty that I have despised; when I think of the hatred and vengeance with which Thou dost pursue sin, if I had to expect mercy and pardon in my own name, by my own tears and merits, then I might indeed give myself up to despair; but when I cast my eyes on my God crucified for me, who shed His blood to the last drop in satisfaction for my sins; when I at the same time consider that I can, if I will, participate in this treasure, in this superabundant redemption: then I must cease to despair, and must lay aside all inordinate fear; for with this treasure I can offer an infinite satisfaction to Thy justice, and blot out countless sins. This, my dear brethren, is the thought that for some time past has comforted me, and will still continue to be a source of consolation whenever I have the honor to hold in my hands on the altar the body and blood of Jesus Christ under the appearances of bread and wine; then it seems as if I can justly say: Heavenly Father, my Lord and my God! art Thou embittered against me? I have deserved that Thou shouldst be; I acknowledge it; but see, here I have something that can appease Thy anger. If I have merited the eternal pains of hell, and I confess that I have done so a thousand times, see what I now offer in full payment! The treasure I hold in my hands belongs to me, for Jesus Christ has given it to me; this treasure is as great and infinite as Thy justice, as Thy mercy. Set as high a price as Thou wilt on Thy pardon, on Thy grace, on Thy heaven, on my sanctification; behold, I have something infinitely more valuable, whereby I can satisfy Thee. I do not wish or desire that Thou shouldst regard me; but "look on the face of Thy Christ;"⁴ of Thy Son, who died

¹ Mitte gladium tuum in vaginam.—John xviii. 11.

² Pater, dimitte illis.—Luke xxiii. 34.

³ Nolo mortem impij, sed ut convertatur impius a via sua, et vivat.—Ezech. xxxiii. 11.

⁴ Respice in faciem Christi tui.—Ps. lxxviii. 10.

for me! If Thou wilt remember my sins, I cannot say Thee nay; but at the same time remember my Saviour, who took those sins on Himself. Him I now offer Thee, and through Him I now beg and hope for Thy mercy with a contrite heart. These thoughts, my dear brethren, you can easily excite whenever during the holy Mass the sacred Host is elevated on high, when in the holy Communion you have this infinite treasure within you, and whenever you ask for pardon before confession with contrition and sorrow for your sins.

And
should be
all the
more
grateful to
Our Saviour.

Meanwhile, what do we owe Him who has thus taken our debts on Himself and paid them? What do we owe this divine Son who voluntarily became our bail, and suffered such a painful death, that we might have no reason to dread eternal death? If I was a criminal condemned to death, and stood already under the gallows with the rope around my neck, waiting to be launched into eternity, and a man came up who offered to die in my place in order to save my life, what would be my feelings? what the sentiments of my heart towards such a benefactor? And do we owe less to this great Lord, who would have been equally happy without us in His heavenly glory, and yet offered to die for us that we might live forever? "What shall I then render to the Lord?" let us say with St. Bernard; "if I owe Him myself altogether for having made me, what shall I give Him for having redeemed me, and redeemed me in such a manner?"¹ Now let the whole world resound with the words of the Apostle: "You are not your own. For you are bought with a great price."² Oh, there is nothing more true! Completely and by an infinite right do we belong to Him who has given Himself completely for us. "Christ died for all: that they also who live may not now live to themselves, but unto Him who died for them."³ In His love we ought indeed to consume our lives, since He has given up His life for us; for if He had not died, we should have had to suffer eternal death. Truly, O Jesus, worthy of infinite love! Thou art my sole hope, my sole consolation! I cast myself at Thy feet nailed to the cross for me, that the whole world may know that I am Thine, that I am Thy slave, Thy servant, bought by Thee, not for gold or

¹ Quid ergo retribuam Domino? quod si totum me debeo pro me facto; quid pro me refecto, et refecto tali modo?

² Non estis vestri. Empti enim estis pretio magno.—I. Cor. vi. 19, 20.

³ Pro omnibus mortuus est Christus: ut et qui vivunt, non jam sibi vivant, sed ei, qui pro peccatis mortuus est.—II. Cor. v. 15.

silver, but by Thy precious blood and Thy death on the cross. Where should I and all men be if it were not for Thee, and if Thou hadst not had pity on us? I thank Thee then with all my heart for that love, the like of which I should never have dared dream of if faith did not instruct me. What return shall I make Thee, if not, poor as I am, to devote myself altogether to Thy service and love? Yes, I am Thine, and Thine I wish to be for all eternity. Do with me whatever is pleasing to Thy divine will; command Thy servant as Thou wilt. "My heart is ready, O God; my heart is ready" to do Thy will in all things. I am not worthy of life if I should give it to any one but Thee alone, who for my sake didst give up life and spirit. Amen.

FOURTEENTH SERMON.

ON THE LAST WORDS OF CHRIST ON THE CROSS.

Subject.

Jesus dies crying out in a loud voice; no human heart should be so hard as not to be moved by His voice.—*Preached on Good Friday.*

Text.

Jesus autem iterum clamans voce magna, emisit spiritum.
—Matt. xxvii. 50.

"And Jesus again crying with a loud voice, yielded up the ghost."

Introduction.

So that Jesus had to die and give up the ghost! Oh, what a fearfully severe doom He suffered! A judgment without mercy! And when I reflect on its circumstances, I might well say: never has the world experienced a greater injustice than this sentence. For to condemn a man, an innocent man who had never done any wrong, to death, and to a violent and public death, and that without giving him any chance of defending himself or offering him any consolation whatever: is that right? Yet that is what happened to the Son of God to-day; and, what at first sight appears incomprehensible to me, the judgment was pronounced and accomplished in Him from Heaven itself. With regard to His death: could it well be more shameful or painful?

¹ Paratum cor meum, Deus, paratum cor meum.—Ps. lvi. 8.

He had to obey His Father "unto death: even to the death of the cross;"¹ a death that was then the punishment inflicted on robbers and murderers. Where? when? how was this shameful death inflicted? The city in which it happened was Jerusalem, then a theatre of the world, the dwelling of the chosen people of God; so that there could be less reason for doubting the righteousness and justice of this execution. The place in which He died was Mount Calvary, a place of execution furnished with wheels and gibbets. The time was that of the greatest festival of the Jews, when numbers of people were wont to assemble from all parts; so that this disgraceful death might be made known throughout the world. In the presence and sight of this little world, in the clear light of day, Jesus hung on the cross bare and naked between two thieves, and gave up the ghost. And why? What fault had He committed? "He hath done all things well,"² was the testimony given in His favor by the Jews a short time before. The unjust judge, Pilate, confesses: "I find no cause in Him."³ Tell us, O Lord, art Thou conscious of some secret crime, for which Thy heavenly Father inflicts on Thee such a fearful death? "I do always the things that please Him,"⁴ He used to say during His life. And couldst Thou then not make known Thy innocence to Thy Father? Yes, that too He did; most pitifully had He entreated Him a short time before in the Garden: "My Father, if it be possible, let this chalice pass from Me."⁵ But He was not heard; Jesus had to die. Heavenly Father, I ask Thee not where is Thy mercy, but where is Thy justice? Hear the answer He gives me and all who wonder at the severity of this sentence, in the words of the prophet Isaias: "For the wickedness of My people have I struck Him,"⁶ and allowed Him to be put to death. Jesus became bail for the sins of the world, and took them on Himself to satisfy the anger of His Father completely; and for that reason, says St. Paul, "God showed Him to the world in that guise, to let us see what a strict atonement and satisfaction He requires for sin."⁷ There, my dear brethren, we have the cause and justification of this seemingly most cruel sentence. O sin, what terrible malice

¹ Usque ad mortem : mortem autem crucis.—Phillip. ii. 8.

² Bene omnia fecit.—Mark vii. 37.

³ Nullam invenio in eo causam.—John xviii. 38.

⁴ Ego quæ placita sunt ei, facio semper.—Ibid. viii. 29.

⁵ Pater mi, si possibile est, transeat a me calix iste.—Matt. xxvi. 39.

⁶ Propter scelus populi mei percussit eum.—Is. liii. 8.

⁷ Quem proposuit Deus ad ostensionem justitiæ suæ.—Rom. iii. 25.

must be hidden in thee, when by the just judgment of God the Son of God must be thus executed to atone for thee! Yet, O sin, how little is thought of thee! For what trifling causes men of all conditions commit thee daily! O dearest Saviour, what do we poor mortals not owe Thee for having thus voluntarily taken our debt on Thy shoulders, and paid it in such an astounding manner? And yet how few men there are who acknowledge this benefit, and are grateful for it as they should be! My dear brethren, all these ideas I developed more in detail on this day last year. To-day I will confine myself to the consideration of the last cry sent forth by our God as He was dying for us: "And Jesus again crying with a loud voice, yielded up the ghost."

Plan of Discourse.

Jesus dies crying out with a loud voice; no human heart should be so hard as not to be softened by that voice. Such is the whole subject of this sermon, or rather meditation; its object is the amendment of our lives and a constant love of Our Lord.

Mary, Queen of martyrs! whose heart was pierced with a sword of sorrow as thou didst stand at the foot of the cross beholding the shameful death of thy Son, and ye angels who wept bitterly at the death of your Creator, obtain for us all that sorrow of heart that Our Saviour now requires of us, that we may bewail our sins, and hearkening to His voice henceforward, love above all things that God who died for us!

Amidst all the mockeries, insults, pains, and torments of His passion, the Saviour, like a lamb, as the prophet says, led to the slaughter, opened not His mouth; but at last on the cross He raised His voice seven times in His dying moments. His first words were meek and loving; He forgot Himself, and only thought of His persecutors and tormentors, that they might not have to suffer for the terrible crime they were committing: "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."¹ So He called out to His heavenly Father. The next was a voice of mercy, directed to the thief who was His companion in death: "This day thou shalt be with Me in paradise."² The third was a voice of compassion, with which He offered a last consolation to His afflicted Mother and to His weeping and beloved

Seven times did Jesus raise His voice on the cross.

¹ Pater, dimitte illis; non enim scunt quid faciant. - Luke xxiii. 34.

² Hodie mecum eris in paradiso. - Ibid. 43.

disciple: "Behold thy son; behold thy Mother."¹ The fourth was a voice of entreaty, with which He asked for a draught of water to appease His burning thirst: "I thirst."² The fifth was a pitiful and complaining voice: "My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?"³ The sixth was a joyful voice: "It is consummated;"⁴ all My sufferings are at an end. The seventh was a dying voice: "Father, into Thy hands I commend My spirit."⁵ After having spoken these words, as St. Luke tells us in the gospel, He gave up the ghost. But St. Matthew and St. Mark seem to allude to another voice, and that a loud one, with and in which the spirit of the Lord departed: "Again crying out with a loud voice;"⁶ and, according to St. Mark: "And Jesus having cried out with a loud voice, gave up the ghost."⁷ What He said on this occasion, and the meaning of that last loud cry, is not mentioned by either evangelist.

The meaning of this last loud cry He uttered is explained differently.

Different authors assign different causes and meanings for this loud cry. St. Chrysostom, St. Jerome, and others are of opinion that the voice was produced not naturally, but by a miracle; for as experience teaches, the near approach of death takes from the dying man all his strength, and he loses the use of his voice as well as that of the other senses, so that it is not possible for him to cry out. But by this last miracle Jesus wished to show that He died, not through necessity or by force, but of His own free will; such are the words of St. Chrysostom.⁸ And this accords with what Christ Himself said of His soul: "No man taketh it away from Me: but I lay it down of Myself; and I have power to lay it down: and I have power to take it up again."⁹ Again, it was a sign that He was not merely man, but God as well, who according to His own good will could change the laws and rules of nature; therefore the centurion, as St. Mark tells us, when he heard this dying voice of the Saviour, publicly cried out that Christ was the Son of God: "And the centurion, who stood over against Him, seeing that crying out in this manner He had given up

¹ Ecce filius tuus. Ecce mater tua.—John xix. 26, 27.

² Sitio.—Ibid. 28.

³ Deus meus. Deus meus. ut quid dereliquisti me?—Matt. xxvii. 46.

⁴ Consummatum est.—John xix. 30.

⁵ Pater, in manus tuas commendo spiritum meum.—Luke xxiii. 46.

⁶ Jesus autem iterum clamans voce magna.—Matt. xxvii. 50.

⁷ Jesus autem, emissa voce magna, expiravit.—Mark xv. 37.

⁸ Ut non necessitate, sed voluntarie se mori ostenderet.

⁹ Nemo tollit eam a me, sed ego pono eam a meipso; et potestatem habeo ponendi eam, et potestatem habeo iterum suscipiendi eam.—John x. 18.

the ghost, said: Indeed this man was the Son of God.”¹ Thirdly, that cry served as a sign that the justice of God was now fully satisfied, and man reconciled with his heavenly Father. In this sense the Apostle writes to the Hebrews: “Who in the days of His flesh, with a strong cry and tears, offering up prayers and supplications to Him that was able to save Him from death, was heard for His reverence.”² Parradius says that it was a cry of triumph, and that the Lord sent forth that loud voice in the moment of death as a hero who pursues his vanquished enemy, as the Lion of the tribe of Juda roars when about to take His prey from the now conquered powers of hell; according to the words of the Prophet Amos: “Will a lion roar in the forest if he have no prey? Will the lion’s whelp cry out of his den if he have taken nothing?”³ Others say that this cry was the last good-bye of Our Lord to the world; as if He said: Farewell, O world, that I have bedewed with My sweat and blood! Farewell, O world, by whom I have been treated so ill! Thou dost indeed merit to be destroyed in this very moment; but I forgive thy cruelty to Me! Farewell, O air, that I breathed for three and thirty years; now I respire thee for the last time! Farewell, O beloved people, whom I redeemed before all others, and by whom I have nevertheless been so inhumanly executed! Farewell, Jerusalem, whose streets I have walked so often; whose children I have so often wished to gather together as the hen gathers her chickens under her wings, and thou wouldst not! Farewell, dearest Mother; thou didst see Me as a Child in the stable of Bethlehem; now thou seest Me dying on the cross as a malefactor in the full light of day; from thee I have received My body; at thy side I now give up My spirit into the hands of My Father!

Finally, says St. Bernard, this voice was directed in a moral sense to all men who were then in the world, and to their successors till the end of time: “He cried out in a loud voice, that all might hear Him.”⁴ He thus wished to make known His last will, and after having endured in our stead that most strict justice without mercy, He addresses to us a petition for mercy, as it

It is addressed to us men: to those who entertain hatred and enmity.

¹ Videns autem centurio qui ex adverso stabat, quia sic clamans exprasset, ait: Vere hic homo Filius Dei erat.—Mark xv. 39.

² Qui in diebus carnis suae, preces supplicationesque ad eum qui possit illum salvum facere a morte, cum clamore valido et lachrymis offerens, exauditus est pro sua reverentia.—Heb. v. 7.

³ Numquid rugiet leo in saltu, nisi habuerit prædam? Numquid dabit catulus leonis vocem de cubili suo, nisi aliquid apprehenderit?—Amos iii. 4.

⁴ Alta voce clamavit, ut ab omnibus audiretur.

were, that we may do Him a slight favor in return for the great love shown us by Him. And what is that favor? Mark this. When a dying father commands anything with a sign on his death-bed, that command is wont to make a deep impression on the minds of his children, and to neglect fulfilling it, except in the case of impossibility, would be looked on by the world as a heinous crime; therefore we hear many say: my father told me to do so on his death-bed; I cannot and will not neglect it. In the same disposition then should you hear the last will of your dying Saviour, which I shall now make known to you in His name. Is there perhaps some one in this church who on account of an insult offered him is at variance with his neighbor, or lives even with his wife in hatred, contention, and enmity? To him I would say in the words of Joseph's brethren, as we read in the Book of Genesis: "Thy father commanded us before he died, that we should say thus much to thee from him: I beseech thee to forget the wickedness of thy brethren, and the sin and malice they practised against thee."¹ Thy Father, O man! thy Jesus, thy Saviour has also commanded me before, and in the hour of His death, to speak to you in His name, and say to you: I beg of you as a last favor to forget the wickedness, the insult offered you by your brothers and neighbors; to pardon from your heart that neighbor, that fellow-citizen, that man, that woman, whom you have hitherto considered as an enemy, and whom you could not bear to look on with an eye of favor; on this day on which your Creator gives up the ghost for your sake, go to that enemy, be reconciled with Him, give up all hatred, and live with him in peace in future. If you think perhaps that on account of the great injustice done you, it is for him rather to humble himself and make overtures to you, then I must remind you of the example given you by your dying God, and repeat for you again the words He spoke shortly before His death to His Father: "Father, forgive them." Are you then greater than He, your God? Is your honor of more importance than His? Has your neighbor dealt more unjustly with you than the executioners with Him? My neighbor has, you say, lessened my good name and reputation by his evil tongue; but he has not taken your life. He has assailed me with biting words; but he has not scourged you

¹ Pater tuus præcepit nobis antequam moreretur, ut hæc tibi verbis illius diceremus: Obsecro ut obliviscaris sceleris fratrum tuorum, et peccati atque malitiæ quam exerceverunt in te.—Gen. 1. 16. 17.

with rods. He has threatened me with his hands; but he has not pierced your hands and feet with nails. He is the cause of injury to me; but he has not stripped you of your clothing. He has laughed and sneered at me; but he has not led you about in public as a fool, nor hanged you on a gallows and murdered you, as was done with your Saviour. You have not deserved such treatment from him; but you have deserved far worse from God on account of your sins. And Jesus, who was altogether innocent, how did He deserve to be so ill-treated? Yet, when He might have revenged Himself with a breath, He pardons and begs His Father to do no harm to His enemies. Ah, I continue in the words of Joseph's brethren: "We also pray thee to forgive the servants of the God of thy father this wickedness."¹ For the sake of your dying Father and Saviour, forgive your enemy the injury he has done you! If the man himself is not worthy of your friendship, at all events Jesus deserves to have His last request granted.

Is there any one present in this church who has in his possession ill-gotten goods? To him I would say that the last dying words of the Saviour are those we read in the Gospel of St. Luke: "The Son of man hath not where to lay His head."² Here I hang in mid-air, bare and naked, on the wood of the cross, and have not a thread wherewith to cover Myself, nor a place in the wide world on which to lay My dying head. By this poverty He entreats you at least to lay aside that burden of your neighbor's property, and to make restitution; for otherwise what you possess unjustly will prevent you from entering into the gate of heaven which He has to-day opened for you by His death. What can it avail you to have gained the whole world with all its treasures, if you suffer the loss of that precious soul of yours bought by Him at such a dear price? Is there any one present who on account of his wealth and good fortune is proud and puffed-up, and apt to despise others? To him I would say that Our Lord's last words are those of the Prophet David: "I am a worm, and no man; the reproach of men, and the outcast of the people."³ I, the Lord of heaven and earth, humbled Myself for your sake, and was jeered at and contemned as a worm, as the very outcast of the people: "Learn of Me, because I am meek

To the avaricious, unjust, and proud.

¹ Nos quoque oramus ut servis Dei patris tui dimittas iniquitatem hanc.—Gen. i. 17.

² Filius hominis non habet ubi caput reclinet.—Luke ix. 58.

³ Ego sum vermis, et non homo: opprobrium hominum, et abjectio plebis.—Ps. xxi. 7.

and humble of heart.”¹ See the example I give you, and learn to be humble, since you have received from Me as an alms all that you possess; and do not despise or undervalue those for whom I shed My blood and gave My life, no matter how poor and lowly they may be.

To the unchaste.

Is there any one present in this church who, although he sees his God dying in extreme agony, yet desires to follow the lusts of flesh, or is entangled with the love of some creature that places him in the proximate occasion of sin, and makes it, as it were, compulsory on him to offend God? To him I would show all the wounds received by the Lord during His passion, and say those words of complaint uttered by the Psalmist: “They have persecuted Him whom thou hast smitten: and they have added to the grief of my wounds.”² See, O heavenly Father! Thy Son whom Thou hast punished so severely for the sins of others; He is still persecuted daily by the unchaste, and they add to His torments! Will you not, O unchaste man, in the consideration of these wounds, tame your unruly desires, overcome yourself, and shun that beastly and momentary pleasure? Will you not, at the sight of the love shown you by your Saviour on the cross, renounce that dangerous intimacy, and avoid once for all that person, that house that has hitherto been a stumbling-block to you? Has that person shown you more love than your God? Was he or she crucified, done to death for you like your Saviour? Have you more joy to expect in that company than God has promised you for all eternity, if you love Him above all things? Will you find any consolation in the flames of hell when you are burning there forever with that person, in those flames where you will mutually curse each other? Ah, make up your mind now for the sake of that God who died for you, and who makes this last request of you, to avoid all forbidden pleasures and dangerous occasions!

To profane swearers, detractors, drunkards, and vain worldlings.

Is there any one here who is addicted to the hellish habit of cursing and swearing, who has the devil always on his lips, as is unfortunately only too common nowadays, so that even children learn the evil habit from their parents? Is there any one present whose lips are often opened to talk uncharitably of his neighbor? To him I would say in the words of the elder Tobias: “Speak not so: for we are the children of saints.”³ We are

¹ Discite a me, quia mitis sum et humilis corde.—Matt. xi. 29.

² Quem tu percussisti persecuti sunt: et super dolorem vulnerum meorum addiderunt.—Ps. lxxviii. 27.

³ Nolite ita loqui: quoniam filii sanctorum sumus.—Tob. ii. 17, 18.

the children of a holy Father, who on the cross took from us and laid on Himself the divine malediction ; who when He was cursed by men, did not curse them in return, but bestowed blessings and peace on them ! Is there any one here present who is addicted to immoderate drinking, whereby he often deprives himself of the use of reason, consumes the substance of his wife and children, ruins his health and shortens his life? Him I would remind of the pitiful word: “I thirst,” *sitio*, and of the complaint in the words of the Psalmist: “In My thirst they gave Me vinegar to drink;”¹ and at the same time I would beg of him to keep within the bounds of moderation as prescribed by the divine law, and by reason itself. Is there any one here present of the number of the vain children of the world, who lead easy, comfortable lives, and seek nothing but pleasure and the indulgence of the senses? To him I would show the body torn with the scourges, the thorn-crowned head, and say that the last cry of the Lord were those words we read in the Gospel of St. Luke: “If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me.”² It is not the broad, easy road of pleasure, but the narrow way of penance and the cross that leads to heaven, as I now show you by My death. I have had to suffer, and suffer till the end, and thus to enter into My glory, although it belonged to Me already as a right; and you hope to walk thus comfortably into a glory that is not yours, without suffering anything. And if that were possible, which it is not, then should I say in the words of St. Bernard: You ought to be ashamed to be a delicate member under a thorn-crowned Head.³

Sinners, whoever you are, whatever be the vice to which you are addicted, hear the last words that Jesus addresses to all of you. In the *Pratum Spirituale* is related a wonderful occurrence. A certain highway robber begged of the Abbot Zozimus to admit him into a most strict order, and after a long time he obtained his request, and to the great astonishment of all, led a most ascetic life. After he had spent nine years in penitential works, a child covered with blood, whom he had murdered before his conversion, appeared to him, and cried out in a plaintive voice: Why didst

To all sinners in general.

¹ In siti mea potaverunt me aceto.—Ps. lxxviii. 22.

² Si quis vult post me venire, abneget semetipsum, et tollat crucem suam quotidie, et sequatur me.—Luke ix. 23.

³ Pudeat sub capite spinis coronato membrum esse delicatum.

thou slay me?' whereupon, filled with terror he ran to the Abbot, told him all that had occurred, and asked what was to be done. My son, replied Zozimus, it is all imagination; recommend yourself to God, and think no more of it. He went into the garden to work, and again the child appeared and said: Why didst thou slay me? He went into the choir to pray; again he heard the words: Why didst thou slay me? He went to his superior a second time. Father, said he, tear, hack, cut me into pieces; I care not what you do with me, as long as I can escape the voice of that child. But all to no purpose. At last he put on his worldly clothes, went into the town, and straight to the court-house; gentlemen, said he, I now confess before you that about ten years ago I committed a murder, and slew an innocent, defenceless child; I beg of you to pronounce sentence on me, and to condemn me to death this very day; for that fate will be a thousand times more acceptable to me than to have to hear the terrible and plaintive voice of that child crying after me a hundred times a day: Why didst thou slay me? And he persisted until he was actually sentenced and beheaded. Sinners, do you see the drift of this tale? Or rather, do you understand what the dying Jesus wishes to say to your hearts? There see Him hanging on the cross, streaming with blood, on the point of expiring; behold the plight to which your sins have reduced this innocent Son of God. It is an infallible truth that by and on account of the sins of the world Jesus was murdered. You have renewed this murder whenever you committed a mortal sin; and that you have done twenty, perhaps ten, five, or three years ago, nay, perhaps in this very year, this very month, this very week. Hear now in the anguish of your consciences His plaintive voice: Why didst thou slay Me? So does He cry out whenever in the church you assist at the holy sacrifice of the Mass, in which the mystery of the passion and death of Christ is renewed. Sinner! what have I done to thee? Why hast thou slain Me? So He cries out when in the evening you retire to rest, in the morning when you rise. And if you have any conscience left, you must hear that voice: Why hast thou slain Me, unhappy man? Sinner, how is it possible that hearing those words you can still enjoy rest and repose? Quick, then! I say to you to-day in His name; at once in order to free yourself from this anxiety, run to the judges: not to a worldly tribunal to be punished for your misdeeds by death, but

¹ Quare me occidisti?

to the tribunal of Jesus Christ in the sacrament of Penance, to be absolved from your guilt that you may live forever!

Or is there any one of those sinners present, who on account of the multitude and enormity of their offences have become pusillanimous, doubtful of the mercy of God, and despairing of forgiveness? To those who despair on account of their sins, To him I would show the pierced heart of Jesus, and remind him that this heart is always open to the sinner, no matter how wicked he may be, to grant him mercy and grace, provided only he truly repents; that His arms extended on the cross are always open to receive the sinner who returns to Him; that His last words on the cross are those of Joseph to his brethren: "Come nearer to me. . . I am Joseph your brother. . . Be not afraid."¹ These brothers, as we learn from sacred history, had dealt most cruelly with Joseph, and sold him as a slave; hence when they heard him speak, and learned that he had become a mighty man in Egypt, they were filled with fear and accused by their guilty conscience, and dreaded not without reason that he might take vengeance on them: "Lest perhaps he should remember the wrong he suffered," they said to each other after the death of their father, "and requite us all the evil that we did to him."² But Joseph, far differently disposed to what their wickedness deserved, proved by his tears the affection and tenderness of his heart before his brothers, filled as they were with fear, could speak; they had not begun to ask for pardon when he granted it, saying to them the comforting words: "Fear not." Come to my arms; why should you be anxious? I am Joseph your brother; I have forgotten all the evil you thought to do me; it was for your good that the Lord sent me here; the only revenge I will take on you is by kindness and generosity: "I will feed you and your children; and he comforted them, and spoke gently and mildly."³ O sinners, it is true you have dealt most cruelly with Jesus our Brother, and you have often sold Him for some trifling thing, some vain pleasure, for the favor of some creature, for something still more contemptible! Oh, what a great and mighty Lord is He to whom you have done this injury! Yet Jesus is not less merciful than Joseph: Come nearer to Me, He says, addressing the comforting words to you; I am Jesus

¹ Accedite ad me; ego sum Joseph frater vester. Nolite pavere.—Gen. xlv. 4, 5.

² Ne forte memor sit injuriæ quam passus est; et reddat nobis omne malum quod fecimus.—Ibid. l. 15.

³ Ego pascam vos et parvulos vestros; consolatusque est eos, et blande ac leniter est locutus.—Ibid. l. 21.

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your Brother. Fear not; God sent Me for your salvation; only return to Me; love Me henceforth, and I will forget completely all that you have ever done against Me.

To those who conceal their sins in confession.

Is there any one present of the number of those sinners, who on account of the deformity of their sins, are ashamed to disclose them properly in confession? To him I would show the graves that were opened at the death of Christ, and the dead that came forth out of them, and call out to him in the words used by Our Lord when He raised Lazarus from the dead: "Lazarus, come forth."¹ Your mouth, O sinner, closed through shame, is a hideous sepulchre, as David calls it; open at last the tomb so long closed; declare candidly in the confessional that secret sin that you have hitherto been ashamed to confess, thus keeping your poor soul in the state of spiritual death! Come forth! Lay down the load of that sin this very day, on which the earth opened at the death of its Creator. Are you ashamed to acknowledge your guilt to a man? Then look at your God hanging to His great shame on the gibbet before the whole world as a criminal and evildoer; not uttering a word of complaint or excuse, but humbly remaining silent, and thus as it were confessing Himself to be guilty! acknowledging Himself a sinner!

To the obdurate who refuse to repent.

Is there any sinner present who still thinks of deferring repentance, or of persisting in his wicked ways? To him I would show the head of Our Lord, downcast and overwhelmed with the weight of sin, and say that the last words of the Saviour were those of David when fleeing from Saul: "After whom dost thou come out? . . . After whom dost thou pursue?"² After a dead Man; after One who has lost His life for you! Have you then not troubled Me long enough? Have you not caused Me sorrow enough? Have I not had patience enough with you? Ah, do not torture Me any longer: "Return to Me, for I have redeemed thee."³ Is there any sinner present who is so obdurate as to be determined never to repent, but to persist in his wickedness? To him I would show the crucifix, as St. Francis Borgia once saw it, pressing a handful of blood out of the side, and throwing it in the face of an impenitent sinner as a sign of reprobation; and I would threaten him with those terrible words which this very Jesus who has died for us will one day thunder forth against

¹ Lazare, veni foras.—John xi. 43.

² Quem persequeris? Quem persequeris?—I. Kings xxiv. 15.

³ Revertere ad me, quoniam redemi te.—Is. xlv. 22.

sinners like a roaring lion: Depart from Me, you cursed, into everlasting fire; away to hell with you; for I have called you and you would not come.

Is there any one present who finds his crosses, trials, poverty, sickness, desolation, persecution, or other misery, too hard to bear, so that he indulges in impatient complaints, murmurs, and discontent with his God? To him I would show the Saviour hanging on the cross, exhausted, humbled, chastised by God, and, as it were, drowned in a sea of sorrows; and I would bid them hearken to His last cry: "O all ye that pass by the way, attend and see if there be any sorrow like to My sorrow."¹ Compare your suffering with Mine, your poverty with Mine, your desolation with Mine, your cross with Mine, and see whether the pain you have to endure is equal to Mine! This consolation I expect from you, that for My sake and for a short time you bear at least with patience and humility that small portion of My sorrows which I have allotted you, in order to bring you all the sooner to Myself in eternal joys.

Finally, I would remind all of you who are present of the constant and unheard-of love of Christ, whose last words were those of the dying Isaac to his son: "After this, what shall I do more for thee, my son?"² I was God, infinitely happy in heaven, and for your sake I lowered Myself to become a poor Man, nay, the very outcast of men; I have undertaken to pay your debts, and have redeemed you from the eternal death of hell that was destined for you: "After this, what shall I do more for thee?" All that I had: My body, My goods, My honor, My blood, My soul I have given for you: now, O man, I am dying; what shall I do more for thee? After My death I will take you with Me to heaven, written in My hands, that I may never forget you; at My death I leave you on earth My flesh as your food, My blood as your drink, My merits as your satisfaction, My whole self as your sacrifice till the end of the world. What shall I do more for thee? See, O man, how your God has loved you! As a reward for this love, all He asks and desires is this last favor, that you love Him, not as much as He loved you, nor as much as He deserves to be loved by you, for that is beyond your power; but at all events that you love Him so much as not to offend Him.

¹ O vos omnes qui transitis per viam, attendite, et videte si est dolor sicut dolor meus.—*Lam.* i. 12.

² Et tibi post hæc, fili mi, ultra quid faciam?—*Gen.* xxvii. 37.

What more just request could He make of us? "In other good works," says St. Jerome, "there might be some chance of putting forward an excuse, but no one can excuse himself from loving. A man may say to me: I cannot fast; but can he say: I cannot love?"¹ You can say that through bodily weakness you may not scourge yourself so as to draw blood; but can you excuse yourself and say: I cannot love? You may say: I am so poor and needy that I cannot give great alms; can you also say: I cannot love? You may say: I find it hard to love my enemy, who has done so much to injure me; can you say: it is difficult for me to love my best friend, who has done nothing but good to me? I cannot love my God, who gave up His life for me! Eh! that we can all do!

Yet the last cry of the dying God has little effect with most men.

Now, my dear brethren, after what we have heard, what should our dispositions be? Are we to remain unmoved by that piteous last entreaty of our Saviour, and to persist in our old sins? Shall I in your name give Him that cruel answer, and tell Him that you will not fulfil nor observe what He so earnestly begged of you in His last moments? Ah, then, hear, O God worthy of infinite love, who hast died for us, hear the only answer I can give Thee; alas, that I should have to say it! No; nothing shall be done of the things Thou desirest; men cannot and will not resolve to give up their old habits, or to change in the least the mode of life they have become accustomed to. They have heard Thee crying and calling to them; they have seen Thee suffer and die; but nevertheless they are determined to persist in the old ways; they are resolved to follow the fashion of the world. Of course on this day of sorrow they will shed a few tears of natural pity over Thy death; but few of them will be animated with a supernatural sorrow for their sins, and a holy hatred of them with a firm resolution never to commit them again. The little religion that still remains has power to induce many to come to listen to a sermon on Thy passion and death, and to meditate thereon with an artificial kind of sorrow; but will all sinners after those sermons become less sinful, lead more careful lives than before? Ah, my God, Thou knowest it, and from what has happened in the past, and from what we have experienced in ourselves, we too can form a fairly good idea of what things will be

¹ In reliquis operibus bonis interdum potest aliquis qualemcunque excusationem prætere-
dere; in habenda vero dilectione nullus poterit excusare. Potest mihi aliquis dicere: non
possum jejunare; numquid potest dicere: non possum amare?

in the future. Now many stand on Mount Calvary with those spectators of whom the Scripture says that when they heard the dying cry of the Saviour, they struck their breasts; ¹ but when the first alarm was past, when the earthquake and the noise of the splitting stones was at an end, they returned and thought no more of Christ. In the same way many Christians perhaps sigh to-day during the sermon; they visit the graves, and weep and strike their breasts; but how long will that state of mind last? And what sign do they give of repentance, of lessening the number of their sins? In a short time they will go back to their former vices that they have now left for a little while; then they will be just as vindictive and full of hatred as before; unjust, avaricious as before; vain and proud as before; intemperate, unchaste as before; slothful and lazy in the divine service as before; in the same dangers and occasions as before; sinners, as they were before. See, O dear Lord, is this the fruit Thou dost expect from the death Thou hast suffered through love for Thy people?

Ah, Christians, is that the return you make for such love? Can your dying Father not obtain the small request He makes of you? Well may the Lord complain in the words of St. Paul: "I am afraid of you, lest perhaps I have labored in vain among you."² "What profit is there in My blood?"³ I was consoling Myself with the hope of enjoying one day in peace the fruits of My labors; now I must sigh forth in the words of Solomon: "And when I turned myself to all the works which my hands had wrought, and to the labors wherein I had labored in vain, I saw in all things vexation of mind."⁴ When I turn My eyes to the work of these pierced hands of Mine, to the blood I shed so copiously, to the shameful death I suffered, I find and experience that all is to no purpose as far as most men are concerned, and that with all My toil I cannot even induce men to cease offending Me. So that I have labored in vain. Ah, yes, dear Lord! And how I bewail Thy death! Why wert Thou willing to be crucified for such ungrateful people? If Thou hadst done as much, nay, even far less for the demons, and if I could now stand at the gate of hell and call out: behold, here is your Saviour, who has died for you on the cross in order to save you from eternal tor-

Of which
He justly
complains.

¹ Percutientes pectora sua.

² Timeo vos, ne forte sine causa laboraverim in vobis.—Gal. iv. 11.

³ Quæ utilitas in sanguine meo?—Ps. xxix. 10.

⁴ Cumque me convertissem ad universa opera quæ fecerant manus meæ, et ad labores in quibus frustra sudaveram, vidi in omnibus... afflictionem animi.—Eccles. ii. 11.

ments if you only repent, I have no doubt that I should make of the devils penitent angels burning with the love of God. And now Thou Thyself, O dying God! dost call out to those men whom Thou hast redeemed from the fire of hell by Thy death; and Thou art treated with contempt, or shalt be so treated in a little time! How is this? Christians, is it possible for you to be in such dispositions? Is not this God sufficiently offended by heathens and Turks? Is He not sufficiently insulted by us Christians? Sinners, will you persist in sin? Why then have I represented to you the dying God? To what end have you heard His last cry? Is it that your sins may be worse and more inexcusable in future? If the voice of God is powerless with you, then indeed I a poor mortal exhort you to no purpose; I merely beat the air in vain.

The hardness of those ungrateful hearts shown by an example.

Yet I do not believe that you will be so hard-hearted that to-day at least you will not make an earnest resolution to sin no more. Hear by way of conclusion what Valerius Maximus relates of a father who had an only son, who was very wicked. This son was so far gone in vice that he determined to make away with his father; and to accomplish this design he thought either of hiring an assassin or else secretly administering poison. The father, who had never done anything to harm his son, or given him the least occasion for such horrible designs against his life, when he found how matters stood, treated the wicked young man with all the more love and tenderness, thinking that he would thus perhaps win his affection. But to no purpose; and so he had recourse to the following means: he took a sword, hid it under his cloak, and asked his son to go out with him for a walk. He led him into a gloomy forest far away from all human habitations; here my son, said he, we are now alone; and so saying he opened his cloak and showed the sword he had concealed under it. The son, amazed and frightened by a guilty conscience, at once began to think that it was all over with him, and that his father was about to be revenged on him. But the good father had very different thoughts in his mind. He fell on his knees; my son, said he, take this sword, and as you cannot bear to see me any longer in this world, put an end to me; here is a private place in which you can safely glut your wrath on me; and here is my bosom; strike boldly, I will not defend myself. I have brought you into this lonely place in order that when you have taken my life which I now offer you, your own honor and life

may be safe. To put an end to me by poison or other means, as you had intended, would have been too dangerous for you, for your crime might have been discovered; but now you can slay me without the least apprehension of danger. If you are cruel enough to forget that you are my child, yet will I never forget that I am your father. I have given you life, and by my death I will do my best to save you from the hands of the executioner. Once again, my son, my dear son! do what you have been so long wishing to do; strike, slay me as you please! In any case I must die soon, either by your hand, or through the trouble and sorrow caused by the undeserved manner in which you hate and persecute me, your father. My consolation now in dying will be that I have succeeded in hiding from the world your shame. Hard as was the heart of that wicked son, it was softened by these words. Confounded by the thought of his own malice, and at the same time ravished by the knowledge of his father's excessive goodness, he threw himself at his feet, sobbed and sighed and shed copious tears, so that for some time he could not utter a word. At last with some trouble he managed to articulate a few broken words: O father, dear father, he exclaimed; what have I done? Live forever, dearest father! But I must and will die; turn the sword against me; I can no longer bear the light of day after having acted so cruelly towards you! Pierce me through: I deserve nothing better; and if your hand refuse me this office, I must perform it myself—but his sighs and tears prevented him from going further. The father, no less moved, could hardly speak; they embraced each other heartily, and for a long time mingled their tears together; the one weeping for sorrow at having hated such a loving father; the other for joy at having at last won the love of his son. My dear brethren, it is no matter for surprise to us that the son was thus moved on that occasion; but what should we think if he had remained as hard-hearted as before, and if he had pierced his father's loving heart with the sword held out to him? Where could we find words to describe the horror inspired by such an inhuman and monstrous cruelty? O sinner, you are that cruel son who have thus ill-treated Jesus your heavenly Father; and what has He ever done to harm you? He has given you your life and all that you have; but you, who should therefore love Him above all things, have attempted His life as often as you committed a grievous sin. Meanwhile, with the utmost meekness He has borne

with you all this time in silence, and overwhelmed you with benefits as if you were His dearest child; such is the return He has made for your wickedness. Will all this have no effect on your hard heart? If so, then go in thought, not into a gloomy forest, but to Mount Calvary; there behold your Father hanging on the cross, at the point of death, and that too for you, and pierced by your hand. Pierced by your hand, because your sins have murdered Him; for you, that He may save your life and preserve you from eternal shame and from the grasp of the hellish tormentors. Are you not yet satisfied? Then glut your rage still farther; take the lance in your hand, and pierce the dead body until your cruelty is fully sated! And that is what you have done, and will do in future as often as you commit sin, according to the words of the Apostle, “Crucifying again to themselves the Son of God.”¹

Conclusion
to obey the
voice of the
dying
Saviour, and
to love Him
constantly.

Ah, Christians, have you still human hearts? Then I cannot form such a bad opinion of you, and I console myself with the hope of far better things from you. Let us then fall at the feet of this Father of ours, who was crucified for us, and with true contrition and loving hearts offer Him this resolution that I now make before the cross in the name of all: Crucified God! behold prostrate before Thee those who have cost Thee Thy life, many of whom now acknowledge with sorrow of heart and bitter regret that they have not always loved Thee as Thou deservest to be loved. Ah, who will give me tears enough to bewail and to wash out the cruelty we have shown to Thee, our Father, who loved us to such a death? How often have we not with inhuman cruelty taken from Thy hand the sword Thou didst offer us, and pierced Thy heart therewith? That is, how often have we not abused Thy manifold benefits to offend and despise Thee by many and grievous sins? If to-day an angel were created who knew neither Thee nor us, and he saw Thee hanging there on the cross, and was told at the same time that this was done for our sake, he would certainly look on us as far higher than Thou art, since Thou hast given Thy life for us. But if he heard that Thou art God, and we merely the creatures of Thy hands, and if he considered moreover our ingratitude towards Thee for Thy excessive love, would he look on us as men endowed with reason and free will? Would he not rather hold it as certain that we are wild beasts, whom nature has endowed with nothing but sav-

¹ *Rursum crucifigentes sibi metipsos Filium Dei.*—Heb. vi. 6.

age cruelty? And yet, incredible as it may seem, we are thus wilfully ungrateful to Thee, O dearest Saviour! A thousand times, dear Lord, we execrate and condemn all that we have ever done against Thee! Never again, O Lord, with the help of Thy grace, never for all eternity shall we offend Thee. From this moment forward there shall be an end of sinning with us, and we shall begin to love Thee truly! We all acknowledge and publicly promise in the sight of heaven and earth, that in future we will faithfully perform what Thou hast desired of us with Thy last breath! Now this very moment we lay aside all hatred that we have hitherto entertained against our neighbor; all injuries that have ever been inflicted on us in any way we now place in Thy hands, leaving it to Thee to take what revenge for them Thou mayest please; this very day we will be truly reconciled, remembering that Thou, dearest Father, dost require this of us; this very day, if we have any ill-gotten gains, shall due restitution be made. Once for all, we now renounce all places, houses, company, creatures that have been to us a proximate occasion of offending Thee; this very day shall we give up the friendship and company of that person for whom we have so often acted contrary to Thy commandments. Forever do we now renounce all joys and pleasures that have hitherto prevented us from loving Thee truly, whom alone we should love. This very day shall I declare in confession that sin I have hitherto concealed through shame; this very day shall I have done with the habit of cursing and swearing; this day shall I renounce all detraction and uncharitable talk; this day shall put an end to this or that vanity, to gluttony and drunkenness. No sin, not one more! We love Thee, O God, worthy of all love! Thee do we wish to love truly till the end. And this love we desire to show Thee, not only to-day, but every day of our lives, by the exact fulfilment of the duties of our state for Thy honor and glory, and by patiently bearing the crosses and trials Thou mayest ordain for us. If there is any one here who is not of this mind, who refuses to love Thee, O Lord, then let him be no longer in the number of those for whom Thou hast died. "If any man love not Our Lord Jesus Christ," I say with the Apostle, "let him be anathema,"¹ and rejected. Rejected by those wounds that Thou didst endure for him; rejected by the blood Thou hast shed for him; rejected by Thy heart pierced for his sake; rejected by the death Thou didst suffer for him! But

¹ *Si quis non amat Dominum nostrum Jesum Christum, sit anathema.* - I. Cor. xvi. 22.

do Thou, O good Jesus, by that death, and Thou, heavenly Father, at the sight of Thy Son dying for the love of us, strengthen, confirm, and accomplish by Thy powerful grace this resolution of ours; that it may be our last and constant will too, in which we may give up our souls into Thy hands, and that firmly determined to keep our purpose, we may always say in our hearts: I love Thee above all things, O Jesus, who wast crucified, and didst die on the cross for me! Amen.

FIFTEENTH SERMON.

ON RENEWING THE PASSION AND DEATH OF CHRIST.

Subject.

The passion, death, and crucifixion of Jesus Christ are not yet completed altogether, but are and have been renewed, continued, and increased from the day of His death till the present hour in nearly all their circumstances.—*Preached on Good Friday.*

Text.

Dixit: consummatum est. Et inclinato capite, tradidit spiritum.—John xix. 30.

“He said: It is consummated. And bowing His head, He gave up the ghost.”

Introduction.

A joyful time, my dear brethren! A desirable day! A consoling hour! “It is consummated!” All suffering is at an end; all pains overcome! now the soul of Jesus is leaving His body! “Bowing His head, He gave up the ghost.” Rejoice, ye angels in heaven; exult, ye souls in Limbo; be comforted, ye mortals on earth! “It is consummated!” Jesus dies, and has come to the end of all His sorrows! But why do I break out into these exclamations of joy, when my eyes should rather be suffused with salt tears? For wherever I turn them on this day, I see nothing but signs of a general sorrow and lamentation. On my own shoulders there is a black stole, that is used only as a sign of mourning for death; in all the churches the altars are stripped bare, as a sign that the High-Priest who offers Himself thereon to the heavenly Father, is dead; in the towers the bells are forbidden to be rung so as not to in-

interrupt the silent mourning of the Catholic Church. I hear hardly any other prayers or hymns except the sad *Miserere* or the *Lamentations* of *Jeremias*. My ears resound with the doleful strains of the Church of Christ, now deprived of her Head, when she sighs in the words of the Prophet *Job*: "My harp is turned in mourning, and my organ into the voice of them that weep."¹ And if I consider moreover how on this day all the elements, the planets, the heavens and the earth, and all nature were troubled and showed signs of universal disturbance, much less reason do I find for indulging in exclamations of joy. And when I remember the cause of all this, what heart is so cruel as not to be moved, if not to shed tears of pity, at least to great amazement and wonder at the prodigious events that occurred on this day? Innocence itself, the Creator of heaven and earth, the most loving Father, is taken prisoner, bound, accused, condemned, nailed to the cross by the wicked, by His own creatures, by His ungrateful children. God is murdered! Who can refrain from a shudder of horror, when even the angels themselves could not restrain their tears?² So that I have done wrong, and have intruded injudiciously with my shouts of joy and triumph into the house of mourning and death, where all laughter is most unsuited. Yet my intention was good; I only wished to congratulate my dead Redeemer because all His sufferings and torments are now at an end once for all; to congratulate the souls in Limbo because on this day they are released from prison; to congratulate men because the great work of their redemption is fully accomplished; and by the death of the Saviour we, from being slaves of the devil, have become heirs to heaven and companions of the angels. And truly where could I find a greater subject for rejoicing than this? Nevertheless I confess that I have done wrong, not merely because this day is one of public sorrow and mourning, but because I see that the chief and first cause of my exultation is null and void. In the moment of Thy death, O crucified Jesus, Thou didst call out: It is consummated! There is an end to My sufferings! Ah, if that were indeed the case, as I first imagined, then indeed would I too shout with exultation, and cry out at the top of my voice: O joyful time! desirable day! consoling hour! But the very words that filled me with consolation, now that I consider the matter more maturely, sink me down into the abyss of

¹ *Vocem est in luctum vertens mea, et organum meum in vocem fletum.*—*Job xxx. 31.*

² *Angeli pacis amare flebant.*—*Is. xxxiii. 7.*

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despondency. No, dearest Lord, it is not consummated! Thou art still far from that! And if Thou dost permit me, this is what I mean to prove to-day.

Plan of Discourse.

The sufferings, crucifixion, and death of Jesus Christ are not yet fully completed, but from the day of His death have been and still are continued, renewed, and increased in almost all their circumstances. Such is the whole subject of this sermon. What a gross injustice that is: the first part. True repentance and amendment: the conclusion that I trust God will grant us all the grace to arrive at. I go on to prove my statement. But wo to those who supply me with the arguments to maintain my assertion, and show it to be true.

For them, and I am in their number, I beg Thy mercy, dear Lord, according to Thy own example which Thou gavest us when Thou didst implore Thy heavenly Father's pardon for Thy executioners. For all others I entreat the grace of a childlike sympathy and constant love for Thee; so that Thou mayest have all the more consolation from them, the more the others afflict Thee! O Mother, sorrowing at the foot of the cross of my Saviour! and ye angels who wept through pity, obtain for me burning words that may pierce my heart and the hearts of my hearers, and impel us to repent sincerely of all our sins, and to fervently love our dead Saviour.

The sufferings that Jesus had to endure from the Jews are finished.

“It is consummated.” These words are explained by St. Cyril in the following sense: The Saviour says, “It is consummated” to signify that the power the Jews had of tormenting Him ceased with His death.¹ And what terrible torments did they not invent to afflict Him? Did their cruelty leave anything untried? Was there any moderation or bounds to the mockery and torture they inflicted on Him? With reason then does He say: It is consummated. Yes, dear Lord, in that sense I acknowledge it; for the Jews, the high-priests, the judges, the executioners, who had Thee in their power, are not now able to rage against Thee any more; the torments they inflicted on Thee are finished by Thy death; against that I have nothing to say.

But not

But there is one thing that Thou in Thy meekness didst say

¹ Consummatum jam esse Salvator dicit, quia sæviendi Judæorum postestas in ipsum per mortem suam terminum habuit.

nothing of in Thy death: our cruelty is not yet satiated; we, we Thy Christians, Thy blood-relations, Thy brothers and children, we I say, are continually inventing new tortures with which to rage against Thee as far as we can even now, although we know Thee and meditate on what Thou hast done for us, and acknowledge that for our sakes Thou wert nailed to the cross! I take St. Paul as witness to the truth of this; he is one of Thy apostles, by whose mouth Thou hast spoken; his words to the Hebrews are well known and at the same time terrible: "Crucifying again to themselves the Son of God, and making Him a mockery."¹ Thus St. Paul testifies that neither the outward sufferings of Thy body, signified by the crucifixion, nor the inward agony of the soul, which he understands by the mockery, is terminated, but that both are increased without intermission.

those He has now to endure from men.

But in what manner? How can this be? Jesus Christ is now seated in His glory at the right of His heavenly Father, as the same apostle says: "Knowing that Christ rising again from the dead dieth now no more, death shall no more have dominion over Him."² Do you wish to know, my dear brethren, in what manner Christ is crucified anew by us mortals? Ask St. Thomas of Aquin, who explains clearly those words of the Apostle: "Crucifying again," etc. The sufferings, pains, and death of the Son of God, says the angelic Doctor, are continued daily and hourly, and that in a twofold manner: first because we sinners, as often as we offend God, do and accomplish that which was the origin and cause of the passion and death of Christ. For what was it that nailed Him to the cross, and murdered Him? The sins of the world did that far more than the Jews and executioners: "He was wounded for our iniquities, He was bruised for our sins,"³ such are the words of the Prophet Isaias. "The breath of our mouth," says the Prophet Jeremias in the Lamentations, "Christ the Lord, is taken in our sins."⁴ Therefore if the death of Our Lord were not of infinite value, and able to atone fully to the Divine Justice, not only for all actual but also all possible sins, it would be necessary for Christ to allow Himself to be crucified and to die as often as a grievous sin is committed, on account of

For the passion and death of Christ are renewed by every mortal sin.

¹ Rursum crucifigentes sibi metipsis Filium Dei, et ostentui habentes.—Heb. vi. 6.

² Scientes quod Christus resurgens ex mortuis jam non moritur, mors illi ultra non dominabitur.—Rom. vi. 9.

³ Ipse autem vulneratus est propter iniquitates nostras; attritus est propter scelera nostra.—Is. liii. 5.

⁴ Spiritus oris nostri, Christus Dominus, captus est in peccatis nostris.—Lam. iv. 20.

the duty and obligation He took on Himself when He became a Hostage to offer His Father full satisfaction for our sins.

Secondly, the passion and death of Christ are renewed by our misdeeds because thereby we place before Him that which He hates beyond all comparison, more than death itself, and which therefore tortures and afflicts Him more than all He has suffered for us; so that if He was offered the choice between enduring again all the pains of His passion, and seeing even one grievous sin committed, He would joyfully select the former in order to be freed from the latter. So far St. Thomas. And St. Bernard agrees with him when He represents Our Lord speaking thus from the cross: "See, O man, what I suffer for thee! There is no pain to be compared with what I endure; and most of all am I tormented by the ingratitude you evince towards Me."¹ See, O Lord, how Thy sufferings and martyrdom can be still renewed, and as far as lies in man's power, are repeated whenever a mortal sin is committed. But now, O sins, O grievous sins, what skill in calculating can possibly count how many of you have been committed from the time of the death of Jesus till now? O sins, who will count how many of you are still committed every day, every hour, nay almost every moment, amongst believing Christians? Thou seest them all, O Lord! they are all before Thy eyes, and Thou must tolerate them against Thy will. Therefore what Thou hast endured and suffered is not yet completed; everything is renewed, everything is increased. If then Thou sayest it is consummated as far as the cruelty of the executioners is concerned, I, alas! can with sorrow of heart and with truth say: it is not consummated as far as those things are concerned that Thou must still endure from Thy Christians! All Thy torments, of whatever kind they are, are daily renewed and daily presented to Thee to suffer them again. Since the tragedy of Thy passion would take too long to be considered in full detail, I will now consider only a few of its chief mysteries, in order to prove the truth of my proposition.

Thus is renewed and perpetuated the agony in the Garden.

First of all, then, I cast the compassionate eyes of my mind on the foot of Mount Olivet in the Garden of Gethsemani, where the torture began; accompany me in thought, my dear brethren. Here I see my Saviour in the dread silence of night on His knees; I hear Him sighing, trembling, shaking over His whole

¹ Vide homo quæ pro te patior! Non est dolor sicut quo crucior; et super hoc est poena gravior, quia te ingratum experior.

body, and exhausted by trouble, fear, anguish, and sorrow, fall prostrate on the ground: "He began to fear and to be heavy,"¹ and to be sorrowful even to death, says the Evangelist St. Mark. I find no one to cheer Him or encourage Him in the midst of His anguish; His disciples are asleep, as if He were of no concern to them; one alone is awake, but it is only for the purpose of adding to Our Lord's sufferings, and carrying out the treacherous project of delivering Christ into the hands of His enemies. By way of consolation an angel is sent by His heavenly Father to present to Him a chalice filled to the brim with all imaginable pains, the sorrowing Lord sighs forth to His Father as He accepts the bitter draught, "Thy will be done."² He takes it, but with such a repugnance on the part of His human nature as, combined with the burden of our sins, was sufficient to make the sweat pour down from Him in drops of blood. Unspeakable must have been the pain, the anguish, the sadness He then suffered! It is consummated! I hear Him say when He bows down His head and gives up the ghost; this chalice, bitter as it was, I have emptied to the dregs; long enough have I borne the burden of sin that pressed the sweat from Me in drops of blood; now I am dying; it is consummated. All the agony I endured in the Garden is now at an end.

I congratulate Thee, dear Lord! Yes, the chalice Thy Father gave Thee is emptied; but the chalice that we men fill, not so much with vinegar and gall, as with the vilest filth, and that we daily force into Thy mouth, that Thou hast not yet emptied. "And," says St. John in the Apocalypse confirming what I now assert, "great Babylon came in remembrance before God, to give her the cup of the wine of the indignation of His wrath."³ Thou wilt certainly remember that great and vicious Babylon of the world that appears before Thee, its God, and always holds to Thy lips that bitter chalice even against Thy will; that chalice of abominations which excites Thy wrath and anger. Seest Thou not so many sinners, even amongst Thy own Christians, who spend year after year in vicious habits without the least effort at amendment; many sinners who live in the proximate occasion of sin and do not try to avoid or remove it; many sinners who every year come forward with their heavy burden of sins (and would to

By those
who persist
in the habit
of sin.

¹ Crepit pavere et tædere.—Mark xiv. 33.

² Fiat voluntas tua.—Matt. xxvi. 42.

³ Babylon magna venit in memoriam ante Deum, dare illi calicem vini indignationis træ ejus.—Apoc. xvi. 19.

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God that they were animated by a true contrition!); many sinners who hold that it is the same trouble to confess one as a hundred, or even a thousand mortal sins, and to cleanse them in Thy blood! What else do these do but pour out daily more and more of the bitter wine of Thy anger, fill Thy chalice with new sorrows, and compel Thee by force to swallow that loathsome draught? And when they add sin to sin, what else do they do but add to the heavy burden that pressed the bloody sweat from Thy body, that if possible they may drain every drop of it? It is not consummated! The pains Thou didst endure in the Garden are not at an end; Thou must still groan under the burden; Thou must always drink the bitter chalice!

The treachery of Judas

And now that monster, that man, that demon, as Thou didst call him, comes before my mind: "One of you is a devil."¹ "Behold Judas, one of the twelve, came:"² and gives Him the traitor's kiss with which he delivers the Lord, the infinite Good, for thirty pieces of silver into the hands of His enemies. Indignation will not suffer me to consider more in detail that shameless perfidy. Thou alone, O Lord, canst adequately describe the cruel pain thus caused Thee by one of Thy own disciples, whose feet Thou hadst washed a little before, whom Thou hadst just fed with Thy own body and blood. But that is no longer necessary; it is consummated: the pain is at an end.

Is renewed by the false and unjust.

Oh, truly, it is consummated! But what a multitude of Judases there are still in the world, who with a false kiss, with the purse in hand, treat Thee more shamefully and wickedly even than Judas himself! "I think," says Origen, and in a few words he points to a number of such traitors, "I think that all they give the traitor's kiss who pretend to love the truth while they betray it."³ For they put on all the outward signs of uprightness and honesty, and yet persecute the Son of God and their fellow-men. There are hypocrites who know how to flatter and be friends, and pay compliments with smiling lips according to the policy of the world, while in their hearts they are the bitterest enemies, filled with envy, jealousy, and hatred; like cats they flatter to the face, while behind backs they rend their neighbor's reputation to pieces, curse and revile him; and even while they are actually paying a friendly visit, have already planned and de-

¹ Ex vobis unus diabolus est.—John vi. 71.

² Ecce Judas, unus de duodecim, venit.—Matt. xxvi. 47.

³ Puto quod omnes proditores veritatis, amare veritatem simulantes, osculi signo utantur.—Orig. Tract. 35 in Matt.

vised how they are to supplant their neighbor, oust him out of his office or employment, and crush him to the dust. All these give the traitor's kiss, contrary to the charity they owe their fellow-men. What a number of Judases there are, O Lord! who everywhere offer Thee and Thy grace for sale, and barter away and betray Thee, if they can only make a little money thereby, and satisfy their greed of gain? And what price do they ask? O Judas, forgive me! I was too indignant against thee when I decried thee as a monster amongst men; I have tampered with thy good name too unwarrantably, although thou hast little left; much less indeed can I approve of thy treachery; yet when I compare many unjust men of our own day with thee, I must say that thou wert more reasonable than they; thou art one of the best of them. Thou hast indeed sold thy Master, Christ, who never did thee the least harm, to His enemies; truly an inexcusable crime! Thou hast sold Him for thirty pieces of silver, altogether too little for such an infinite Good; yet it was enough to induce a thief such as thou wert to risk a little. But they, what do they sell Jesus for? How much do they get for betraying their God? Three pieces of silver; no more; that is all you need offer them, and they will say at once: "I will deliver Him unto you."¹ If you give me an opportunity of gaining a trifling sum unjustly, and keeping it without making restitution, I will deliver Him unto you; for that I will leave God to anyone who wishes to have Him. A few shillings that they now and then either pilfer secretly, or rob their masters of as wages, or otherwise make unjustly in buying and selling in the usual way of business, that seems to them sufficient inducement to sell their God. I will deliver Him unto you: there He is for you! Nay, they do not even fix their price; like Judas they ask in general: "What will you give me?"² and I will deliver Him unto you. There is none of their wares so worthless that they do not try get as much as possible for it; but Thee, their God, they are ready to sell at any price. Is there reason, then, to say: It is consummated? Oh, no! not by any means! This very day perhaps on which we meditate on Thy passion and death, Thou wilt be sold again and betrayed.

I dare not delay longer in the Garden, where I see the Lord bound with chains and fettered with ropes, led therefrom

The denial and mockery in the

¹ Ego vobis eum tradam.—Matt. xxvi. 15.

² Quid vultis mihi dare?—Ibid.

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houses of
the high-
priests.

through the streets of Jerusalem like a thief and a criminal amid the shouts and execrations of the rabble, to different tribunals. I follow Him in thought; false witnesses are suborned against Him; He is accused of being a liar, a blasphemer, a seditious agitator of the people, a sorcerer and magician; an ungrateful servant, and as many think, he whose ear Our Lord had healed in the Garden, smites Him on the cheek; the whole night through He is blindfolded, spit upon, mocked, and pulled hither and thither by the hair. All this He endures with the utmost meekness, in silence, without a word of protest. There was no one to defend Him from those false accusations and calumnies. Even Peter, who had been one of the most courageous of the disciples, denies Him once, twice, three times, one after another, and swears that he never knew the Man. Such was the treatment He suffered in the houses of Annas and Caiphas, the high-priests. But now all these accusations, calumnies, and denials are at an end, since He has given up the ghost. It is consummated. There is a consolation for Thee, O Lord! And indeed they are ended as far as the actual time of Thy passion is concerned.

By different
sinners.

But still Thou art accused as a liar and traitor by those who take the laws, fashions, and usages of the perverse world as the rule and guide of their lives; while they despise the doctrine and teaching of Thy holy gospel as an empty bugbear, as a mere dream of an over-anxious conscience, interpret it in a false sense, and laugh at it. The Jews who did not acknowledge Thy Godhead are not the only ones who deify Thee as a blasphemer; many who call themselves Christians and followers of Thine have the same opinion of Thee. Instead of Thee they have other gods that they adore, either their own interests, or political ends, or the idol of human respect. What will people think or say? they ask. These are the gods that contradict Thy divinity; for their sake Thy laws must be disregarded; on their account men are ashamed to serve Thee publicly! Nor are there wanting those who, after having blindfolded Thee, mock and spit at Thee: when, namely, they hide away in a dark room, trying to conceal themselves even from Thy all-seeing eye, in order to offend Thee all the more freely; or when the actual presence of Thy divinity is recalled to their memories by the faith, and they nevertheless strike Thee in the face with unheard-of presumption, daring to sin in the presence of Thy Godhead in

spite of knowing that Thou art looking at them! Nor was Peter the only one to deny Thee on oath, as St. Augustine says with reason: "Christ is denied not only by him who says he is not Christ, but also by him who denies himself to be a Christian."¹ That denial is made with the lips or by the life one leads. But see now what a multitude of people there are who call themselves Catholics and Christians, while in reality they live like heathens; they are afraid to appear in church on bended knees and with folded hands as a sign of respect before Thy holy altars, but act as if they did not know Thee, as if Thou wert too mean for them; while if a lady or gentleman happens to enter even during exposition of the Blessed Sacrament, they are most profuse in their bows. What a great number there is of those who deny Thee in the confessional, when through a diabolical shame they conceal their sins, or do not confess them properly! No, no! it is not consummated: the insults the high-priest offered Thee are not yet completed, but are almost daily renewed and increased.

From the spiritual tribunal Jesus was handed over to the civil one, to Pontius Pilate, to have sentence passed on Him. There nothing is heard but one accusation after another most unjustly levelled at the innocent Lord in order to compass His death. "Away with Him; away with Him! crucify Him!"² shout the infuriated rabble. Pilate, more reasonable than the maddened crowd (ah, would that he had made a better use of his reason!) first asks: "What evil hath He done?"³ That is not the way to condemn a man. "Behold I bring Him forth unto you, that you may know that I find no cause in Him."⁴ In all that you have alleged against Him I do not find the least reason for condemning Him. "For," say the Sacred Writings, "He knew that for envy they had delivered Him."⁵ Pilate is then well acquainted with the innocence of the Lord, and yet through fear of the people and respect for the high-priests, the Scribes and Pharisees, he does not dare to act according to his duty and set Jesus free. To get rid of the trouble, and at the same time not to offend the people, he sends Our Lord on to Herod, thus renew-

The condemnation
by Pilate
and Herod

¹ Non solum ab eo negatur Christus, quid dicit eum non esse Christum; sed etiam ab eo qui negat se esse Christianum.

² Tolle; tolle! crucifige eum!—John xix. 15.

³ Quid enim mali fecit?—Matt. xxvii. 23.

⁴ Ecce adduco vobis eum foras, ut cognoscatis quia nullam invento in eo causam.—John xix. 4.

⁵ Sciebat enim quod per invidiam tradidissent eum.—Matt. xxvii. 18.

ing with that monarch a long-interrupted friendship. Herod is not a whit more just; he causes the infinite Wisdom to be clothed with a white robe like a fool, and presents Him to the court and army to be laughed at and ridiculed as a simpleton, until at last Jesus is again brought before Pilate. Pilate knew not what to do. He was secretly anxious to set Our Lord free, but when he heard the words, "If thou release this Man, thou art not Cæsar's friend,"¹ oh! then he lost all courage; then he gave the people their choice between Jesus and a notorious robber: "They therefore being gathered together, Pilate said: Whom will you that I release to you: Barabbas or Jesus that is called Christ?"² Innocent Son of God! what didst Thou think of this unjust judge? Yet, it is consummated; Thy death sentence is already fulfilled, and hence there is an end to the unjust accusations as well as to the sentences. It is consummated.

By unjust
judges.

What? Is it really finished? I appeal now to the courts and tribunals that are to be found in the world at the present time. And how are they sometimes administered? How often, O Lord, art Thou not, as the Head, falsely accused in Thy members, and calumniated and oppressed by wicked men? How often are not innocence and justice acknowledged in a case, so that one should at least say with Pilate: I find no cause in him; yet on account of powerful opponents, from whom something is to be feared or hoped for, innocence and truth are either condemned or hushed up, or at all events not released from false accusations. Here and there nowadays in the world, Thou art dragged from tribunal to tribunal, not for one night or day merely, but for years and years, although justice requires that the case should be decided at once.

Not all act in their decisions so that they can say with Job: "If I have made the eyes of the widow wait;"³ or if I have kept them and other oppressed people waiting too long for the settlement of their just demands? Still do Pilate and Herod sometimes renew their friendship, that they may work together against a third person to his detriment. Still art Thou mocked as a fool, when he is laughed at as a simpleton and one ignorant of the world, who endeavors to do justice and defend the right, refuses to approve of and condemns unlawful though usual acts of

¹ Si hunc dimittis, non es amicus Cæsaris.—John xix. 12.

² Congregatis ergo illis, dixit Pilatus: Quem vultis dimittam vobis: Barabbam, an Jesum qui dicitur Christus?—Matt. xxvii. 17.

³ Si oculos viduæ expectare feci.—Job xxxi. 16.

chicanery, and will not allow himself to be corrupted by bribes. Many are still who, firm as they are otherwise, cannot resist the assaults of that formidable battering-ram that made such a forcible attack on the heart of Pilate: "If thou release this Man, thou art not Cæsar's friend;" if you say what you ought, if you advise according to your duty, if you give the decision required by justice and equity, "thou art not Cæsar's friend;" you will lose the favor and patronage of that man, and incur his enmity and hatred. How often does not this one consideration defeat the ends of justice! And how do men act in their individual judgments towards Thee? A passing thought brings, on the one hand, some pleasure before the imagination, some senseless act of vengeance, some chance of gain or of making money, the love of some creature; and on the other hand art Thou with Thy grace and Thy eternal heaven; the mind asks the will: "Whether will you of the two to be released unto you?"¹ There is not much time required for deliberation; at once the rabble, that is, the inordinate inclinations, clamor out: Not this man, but Barabbas; leave us oursensual enjoyments, our greed, our hatred! And whither then with Jesus? To the cross with Him; crucify Him! Whither with the soul? To the demons; crucify it! Whither with heaven? Crucify it; we do not want it! See now, O Lord, if the accusations and unjust sentences against Thee have come to an end, or not! Although Thou canst say of them: It is consummated, yet they are not all finished; they are still daily renewed and increased.

From the tribunal I go to the fore-court of Pilate. There I behold such a pitiful and terrible spectacle, that I know not where to turn my eyes through terror and shame. "Then therefore Pilate took Jesus and scourged Him,"² says the Evangelist St. John. Why? What harm hath He done? "I find no cause of death in Him:" such are the words of Pilate as reported by St. Luke: "I will chastise Him therefore, and let Him go."³ I find no cause, no guilt, no crime in Him. Ah, that is indeed the truth! Therefore I will chastise Him, have Him scourged. What a fiendish conclusion to arrive at! Hear this, ye philosophers! Is there any sophism in logic by which you can justify it? I find no cause in Him, therefore He must be punished. I will leave the answer to this question to Pilate himself, when on

The cruel scourging

¹ Quem vultis de duobus dimitti?—Matt. xxvii. 21.

² Tunc ergo apprehendit Pilatus Jesum, et flagellavit.—John xix. 1.

³ Nullam causam mortis invento in eo: corripiam ergo illum, et dimittam.—Luke xxiii. 22.

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that great day the conclusion he arrived at shall be reconsidered. Jesus after having His garments torn off, is tied fast to a pillar amid rods and scourges! Look not on the terrible sight! The ears are tormented enough by the noise of the whips and scourges and the rattling of chains. What madness possesses the executioners and the rabble crowd in glutting their cruelty on the most tender and sensitive body of Our Lord, urged on as they are by their own innate rage, the shouts of the Jews, the promises and encouragement of the high-priests, nay, by the impulse of the devil himself; for some holy fathers are of the opinion that they were possessed by the evil spirit on the occasion! How they tore the flesh off His bones! It is impossible to say or to reckon how many stripes they gave Him. In any case they so tortured the innocent Lord that, as the Prophet says, there was not in Him a sound place from the crown of His head to the sole of His foot; so that Pilate in the hope of moving the people to pity, showed Him to them in that lamentable plight more like a worm than a man, and said: Behold the Man. Can you see in Him the semblance of a man? Delay not long, cries out Our Lord; there is no more room for wounds in Me. But, it is consummated; the scourging is finished.

By the un-
chaste.

Truly, dear Lord, it is finished for that time; but alas! not for all time! it lasts even to the present day. When the torturers were wearied, and could no longer wield the scourges, human, or to speak more truly, brutal lust comes to the fore; impurity, that general and abominable vice that seizes hold of all sexes, ages, conditions; impurity, that spares neither youth nor old age tottering on the brink of the grave, nor conjugal fidelity, nor the fealty sworn to God in the religious state, nor the reverence due to blood relationship; impurity, which does not hesitate to pollute chambers, houses, gardens, nay, even the house of God; which often makes the throne of divine clemency, I mean the church, a place of shame, a den in which souls are murdered, when even in the place consecrated to divine worship, unchaste looks and desires, and still worse are indulged in; impurity, I say, comes forward, grasps the chains, rods, and scourges, and begins to lacerate Thy body in a new fashion that causes Thee far more pain than the first scourging. No; it is not consummated. This vice still rages, and inflicts on Thee one wound after another.

To have an idea of the number of stripes and wounds thus

inflicted, I ask the vast multitude of men who wallow in that vice. If any such, though I hope not, are here, tell me truly before your scourged Redeemer or say in your own hearts: can you count up all the sins you have committed in this way from the first dawn of reason to the present time by thoughts, desires, wishes, consent, by dangerous words and conversation, by unlawful looks, letters, behavior, and dress, by abominable actions that one may not name? For it is certain, and conscience says the same, that all pleasure deliberately desired, sought, and enjoyed in this matter, even by a momentary thought to which the will deliberately consents, is a mortal sin; can you, I repeat, count all those sins and tell me their number? From most men I shall get no answer, therefore I turn to Thee, my scourged Redeemer, and repeat: Thy scourging is not consummated! I must say to Thee in the words of the thirty-first Psalm: "Many are the scourges of the sinner."¹ Many, nay, countless are the scourges, not that Thou inflictest on the sinner, but that he makes Thee suffer. St. Augustine indeed confesses that when assailed by impure temptations, he was wont to have recourse to Thy sacred wounds; and he says that in spite of old habits of that vice, the consideration of the wounds inflicted on Thy sacred body by him gave him the victory over the temptation.² St. Bonaventure prescribes the same remedy: "Let him who feels carnal desires look at the suffering Jesus."³ For there is no more powerful or salutary means against all the desires of the flesh than "to behold the Lord, our most beneficent Saviour, thus bound to the pillar and cruelly scourged."⁴ But of what use is this means? St. Augustine was soft-hearted enough to be moved by the sight of Thy wounds, O Lord, and to be thus induced to abstain from his former vices; now there are numbers who, like St. Bonaventure, see Thee bound to the pillar, full of wounds, streaming with blood, and yet often in the day they seize the rods and strike Thee again and again until their brutal lust is satiated. I take Thyself as witness to this: Thou dost acknowledge as much by Thy Prophet David: "The wicked have wrought upon My back: they have lengthened their iniquity."⁵ They give no respite, but continue

¹ *Multa flagella peccatoris.*—Ps. xxxi. 10.

² *Cum me pulsat aliquis turpis cogitatio, recurro ad vulnera Christi.*

³ *Qui delectis delectatur carnalibus, aspiciat Christum passum.*

⁴ *Cernere Dominum suum et benignissimum Redemptorem sic ad columnam alligatum sic acriter verberatum.*

⁵ *Supra dorsum meum fabricaverunt peccatores; prolongaverunt iniquitatem suam.*—Ps. cxxviii. 8.

in their wickedness without interruption. In the Old Law Thou didst command the punishment to be commensurate with the gravity of the crime: "According to the measure of the sin shall the measure also of the stripes be."¹ But since in this crime, which alas! many do not look on as grievous, but simply as human weakness and frailty, there is no measure or limit, so the number of stripes Thou must suffer is not limited. It is not consummated! Thy scourging is not yet over; perhaps this very day, on which we meditate on Thy sufferings and death, and certainly not long after Easter, many will renew Thy bitter sufferings.

**The crown-
ing with
thorns**

Nor are the executioners who tortured Our Lord yet satisfied. They see that His head is still free from wounds and bruises, and therefore they plait together sharp thorns in the shape of a crown, and press it on His head violently to deride Him as a mock king, and to add to His torments, so that the blood streams down over His face; and when Our Lord hung on the cross, He Himself pressed this crown deeper and deeper; with what pain and anguish I leave to those who know what a severe headache is. Still He comforts Himself amid it all by the words: It is consummated. Only a moment longer, and then I shall feel no more pain. So it is, dear Lord!

**By those of
hardened
conscience.**

Meanwhile Thou sayest nothing of the thorns that should pierce our consciences with a salutary fear, those thorns that we cast back on Thy head. Our consciences are so hardened by long-continued sloth and laziness in Thy service, and by indulgence in all kinds of vice, that we are hardly sensible any longer of the most grievous crimes against Thee, against the love of our neighbor, and against ourselves. In order to remain undisturbed in this sleep of sin, we often neglect the examen of conscience, we avoid the light like bats and owls; that is to say, when in doubt we fear to ask advice, and dread hearing Thy divine word; we deliberately keep away from sermons, in which the truth would be explained to us, lest our consciences might be pierced with a thorn, and our sinful repose interfered with. Indeed, for a preacher to find an audience it would be necessary for him to have nothing but sweet and honied words on his lips; if he dares to touch on the prevalent vices, and to warn people of their duty and obligations, they will not listen to him; such remarks are all so many thorns that disquiet and annoy us, and

¹ Pro mensura peccati erit et flagellarum modus.—Deut. xxv. 2.

that we prefer to leave to Thy sacred head. Or if we acknowledge our sins and wickedness, we consider them without any feeling of sorrow, nay, with pleasure, delight, and exultation; nor do we hesitate sometimes even to boast of them and to relate them to others. "I have sinned;" and what of it? "what harm hath befallen me?"¹ One confession, if it must be made, will suffice to take away all my sins. No; it is not consummated! The pains caused Thee by the crown of thorns are not yet at an end.

Meanwhile the eyes of my mind behold another spectacle, a great and numerous attended procession going towards Mount Calvary. Jesus now condemned to death, walks wearily along between two thieves with the cross on His shoulders, to the place of execution. Hardly has He reached the summit of the mount, when He falls down fainting through sheer fatigue under the load of the cross. Instead of a comforting drink, they give Him bitter myrrh, sour vinegar, and gall. If the Holy Scriptures did not assure us of it, I could hardly imagine it possible for human beings to act towards a fellow-man in such monstrous fashion. The poor criminal condemned to death is placed on a cart as a general rule to be brought to execution; at least we have never heard of any one being obliged to carry his own gibbet with him. The poor condemned sinner, even if he is the vilest scoundrel, has some good wine given him to comfort and encourage him. But the Son of God, after having been mangled in such a cruel manner, is forced to drink gall and bitter myrrh! Meanwhile I hear Him sighing forth, not so much from pain as through joy and satisfaction: It is consummated! Even this heavy trial has come to an end; even this bitter draught is emptied.

The carrying of the cross and the draught of gall

I wish it were so. But again I am compelled to say no, when I consider myself and the greater number of men, who are, as the Apostle says, "enemies of the cross of Christ; whose God is their belly;"² whose God is their fleshly appetites, that they gratify in every manner possible; whom the very name of the cross terrifies. From morning till night their thoughts are turned on leading a comfortable, delicate, luxurious life. To keep the fasts of the Church in a becoming manner for a few weeks according to ecclesiastical law; to sit for an hour in church in the cold winter-time, not to speak of kneeling; to suffer some

By voluptuaries and the impatient.

¹ Peccavi; et quid mihi accidit triste?—Ecclesi. v. 4.

² Inimicos crucis Christi; quorum Deus venter est.—Philipp. iii. 18, 19.

slight discomfort and inconvenience; to bear a word of contradiction with meekness: oh! that is too heavy a burden for us! So slight is the effect produced, the influence exercised on us by the sight of Thee, our great God, groaning under the heavy weight of the cross, and that too for our sake; although we must acknowledge that on account of our sins we have merited, not a comfortable life, but rather the eternal pains of hell. And though we know that the kingdom of heaven suffers violence; although we have heard from Thyself the words: "If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me;"¹ no, we say, that is not for us; we willingly leave the cross to Thee, and, as far as we can, throw it off our own shoulders on to Thine! We see how Thou art tortured by the bitter taste of the gall and myrrh; but how do we act when Thou sometimes out of sheer love to us and with well-meaning heart sendest us a few drops of the chalice of affliction and adversity? Downcast with disgust and impatience, murmuring against Thee cursing and vilifying those whom we imagine to be the cause of our misfortunes, nay, even complaining of Thee and Thy providence; such is the answer we give to Thy offer of the bitter draught!

Who sometimes bear much for the sake of a creature. Shown by an example.

Ah! I am sure that if something difficult or disagreeable were asked from us, even with a sign by a mere creature whom we love, it would give us the greatest satisfaction, and be esteemed as an honor to please that person even at the cost of much suffering and mortification. John II., king of Portugal, as Louis of Granada writes, deigned on one occasion to visit on foot a servant of his who lay dangerously ill. When he entered the house he asked, as one generally does in such circumstances, how the sick man was. The domestics, astonished at the visit, answered: Ah, very ill indeed! and worst of all, we cannot do anything for him: this morning the doctor prescribed a draught, and we begged him for the love of God and all the saints to take it, but in vain; he will not even allow it to remain in the same room with him; and if we venture to mention a word about it, he begins to shudder and grow angry. Having heard this, the king entered the room, sat down by the bedside, and greeted the sick man in the most friendly manner. After talking for a short time he caused the medicine to be brought in, and asked the sick man how often he was

¹ *Si quis vult post me venire, abneget semetipsum, et tollat crucem suam, et sequatur me.*
—Matt. xvi. 24.

ordered to take it. Ah, replied the other, with a grimace, I cannot take it; I would rather die; the mere taste of it is enough to disgust me; it is so bitter and insipid. Well, then, said the king, will you not at least do as much as I? and so saying, he took the medicine and drank a good draught of it. See now, he said to his servant; much good may it do you! I am your king! I am not sick, and do not want medicine; yet through love of you and to give you heart, I have tasted the bitter draught, as you see; will you not do as much for my sake, take the medicine that you are in want of to regain your health and to preserve your life, and drink what I have left of it? O sire, answered the sick man; your majesty deigns and condescends to mortify yourself to such an extent for the sake of a poor servant! I must take the draught now, even if I knew that it would poison me. And he drank the medicine to the dregs.

Ye oppressed, afflicted, and suffering, where are ye? Bitter, I must confess, is the draught prepared and presented to you, when you are sometimes troubled with many trials, misfortunes, poverty, and sickness. Sensual nature feels a violent repugnance to such things; but remember from what a loving hand they come to you. They come from the Sovereign King, and are presented to you for no other reason than because they are necessary to the health, nay, to the eternal life of your souls. If this consideration is not enough to induce you to accept them with resignation, look then on Jesus your Saviour, your sovereign God: for your sake He puts to His lips the bitter chalice of the most violent pains, and drinks not merely one or two drops of it, but drains it to the very dregs. To you He gives only what remains on the verge of the cup, that is, the smallest share in His sufferings, because He has endured infinitely more than you could bear. Will you refuse what He offers? Should not this thought console you and alleviate your cross? Ah, the pity of it! A mortal king can do that much with a man, but Thou, O King of heaven and earth, canst not effect so much with Thy own children, whom Thou hast redeemed by Thy death! If there are ten who, encouraged by Thy example, bear their cross now and then with readiness, and, resigning their will to Thy beneficent will, say and think in all contradictions: "Yea, Father, for so hath it seemed good in Thy sight;"¹ Thy holy will be done! there are hundreds on the other hand who persist in murmuring and com-

But cannot bear anything for the sake of Christ.

¹ Ita, Pater, quoniam sic fuit placitum ante te.—Matt. xi. 28.

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plaining and cursing in their disgust and impatience. Thus we still give Thee the bitter chalice of suffering to drink; thus we add to Thy afflictions, and every day by the sins we commit in adversity, we pour more and more myrrh and gall into the cup of Thy sufferings. No; it is not yet consummated!

The crucifixion and death of Christ,

But it will at all events come to an end when the life of Our Lord is at the last gasp. Jesus hangs on the cross in mid-air with His hands and feet pierced through: "They crucified Him there." The Evangelist is dumb with horror, and cannot find words to describe the scene further. I too am reduced to silence, and cannot form an idea of the pain suffered while the sacred body of the Lord was hanging on the three or four nails for three whole hours. Consider this in your imaginations, my dear brethren, if you can. I cast my eyes up to my crucified Redeemer. Jesus then after having heard many words of mockery and scorn and blasphemy, uttered against Him by the passers-by while He was in that wretched plight that might have moved even a stone to pity: there He hangs, the poor fool! "He saved others; Himself He cannot save:" see what a deceiver He is! "If Thou be the Son of God, come down from the cross;"¹ and so on; after all this, Jesus allows His head to sink, and cries out to the whole world in a clear voice: It is consummated! "And bowing His head He gave up the ghost." God is dead! The sun hides away, the heavens are darkened, the earth opens, the mountains and rocks burst asunder. How is it with our hearts? Ah, I need not wait for an answer! It is consummated; there is an end of it all; so dost Thou speak, O dead Jesus, even after Thy death and out of Thy dead heart to us men! Here, when all tongues are dumb, all eyes bathed in tears, all hearts filled with sighs, here again must I give full rein to my indignation, and ask: is it really consummated?

By each and every sinner, whose cruelty is shown by an example.

Great apostle St. Paul, let thy voice again be heard for me: "Crucifying again to themselves the Son of God, and making Him a mockery;"² again, afresh, repeating the torments of His crucifixion. No; even the death of Christ is not finished; daily in a moral sense, as far as lies in our power, it is repeated by our sins. We see and so often meditate on Thy death on the cross; we see Thee die for us, to save us from eternal death; and what

¹ Ibi crucifixerunt eum.—Luke xxiii. 33.

² Alios salvos fecit, seipsum non potest salvum facere. Si Filius Dei es, descende de cruce.—Matt. xxvii. 42, 40.

³ Rursum crucifigentes sibimetipsos Filium Dei, et ostentui habentes.—Heb. vi. 6.

return do we make Thee? Even the same that that monster of ingratitude in Italy made to the savor of his life. A highway robber was caught in the act; the judge who was then on the way with his satellites to try other criminals, made short work with him, ordering him to be hung straightway on a tree by the side of the road where he was caught, and proceeded on his journey before the robber was quite dead. A short time after, a merchant happens to pass by, and seeing the poor wretch still struggling, takes out his knife at once, cuts him down, and chafes him until he comes to his senses; then like the good Samaritan, he puts him on his horse, intending to bring him to the nearest inn to have him looked after. Hear now the effect of an inveterate habit; the ungrateful wretch, seeing that the merchant had money with him, gets possession of the very knife with which he had been cut down from the tree, plunges it into the merchant's heart, and, that he might escape detection, hangs his body on the same tree that he himself had hung on a short time before, and rides off with his benefactor's horse and money. You are horror-struck, my dear brethren, and cannot restrain your just indignation at such an unnatural murder; nay, you can hardly persuade yourselves that such a monstrous crime was ever really committed. But whether the story is true or not, matters little to me; one thing I know; there are many men, even among Christians, who do not hesitate to commit a similar murder every day. O sinners, you and I are those monsters and prodigies of ingratitude! We were all condemned to everlasting death by the Eternal Father after He had caught our first parents in the act of eating the forbidden fruit; sentence was already passed on us; the rope was round our necks; when behold! the Son of God comes forward, and cuts us loose in His incomparable mercy in order to preserve us in life and bring us to Himself in heaven. And this benefit cost Him much more trouble than it cost the charitable merchant; for in order to confer it, He Himself had to ascend the gibbet and allow Himself to be put to death. There He now hangs, a soulless corpse for our sake, as we have been considering Him. And see, O cruelty, O inhuman and worse than brutish ingratitude! we, after having thus considered Him, cannot keep our murderous hands off Him! For the sake of a few shillings, or a passing pleasure, or to glut our revenge, or for a momentary delight, a vain love, or something still more vile, He must again ascend the gibbet, again be put to death, and that as often as we con-

Thus is
Christ again
nailed hand
and foot to
the cross.

sent to a mortal sin, which, alas! happens every hour and moment! “Crucifying again to themselves the Son of God;” again do we fasten the Son of God to the cross, and with savage cruelty pierce His hands and feet with nails. That right hand of generosity, so lovingly stretched out to us by benefits and long-continued mercy, must again be pierced with the nail, when we offend Him all the more frequently and daringly, because He is good and merciful, because He is so patient and long-suffering in bearing with our faults, because He is so ready to pardon us at any moment and to receive us as His children if we only repent. And in all this His own gifts are the instruments we use to offend Him. Bodily stature, riches, health, honor, and fortune, so freely bestowed on us by His generous hand, are the gifts that must help to pierce again that liberal hand. That left hand of justice, with which He sends us different punishments, public as well as private, to withdraw us from sin and force us, as it were, by violence to serve Him, since His goodness otherwise can make no impression on us, that left hand we nail again to the cross when instead of confessing our faults with contrite hearts, we persist in them without giving any sign of amendment, like the wicked whom the Prophet Isaias represents as saying: “Behold Thou art angry, and we have sinned.” Thou hast let us feel the effects of Thy anger in order to bring us to repentance; but what hast Thou gained thereby? “Thou art angry;” but that troubles us little; “in them we have been always.”¹ In spite of Thy chastisements we continue in our usual vices without any fear of Thy justice. Those feet that toiled over hill and dale, leaving blood-stained tracks after them in search of the lost sheep, and which still pursue us on the road of sin on which we hurry further and further from God and our last end, those feet that follow us in order to bring us back again, we again nail to the cross when we defer repentance from year to year, and keep on saying like those people in the Book of Job: “Depart from us, we desire not the knowledge of Thy ways.”² Thou callest out to us till Thou art hoarse: “Return to Me, and I will receive thee;”³ but we turn away from Thee and answer: it is not yet time; come later on; we do not wish to be converted at present; when we grow old, when death approaches, Thou canst come again! Those feet we nail again to the cross, when, after

¹ *Ecce tu iratus es, et peccavimus; in ipsis fulmus semper.*—Is. lxiiv. 5.

² *Recede a nobis, scientiam viarum tuarum nolumus.*—Job xxi. 14.

³ *Revertere, et ego suscipiam te.*—Jer. iii. 1.

having told our sins in confession, but not duly repented of them, we go again to that house or company, or renew that intimacy which we know to be the occasion of sin to us.

I must cease, dearest Lord! But at the same time I will repeat what I have so often said already: It is not consummated; Thy sufferings, crucifixion, and death are not yet finished. So that we have gained our point, O sinners! We have established our assertion against that of Our Lord, when He cried out: It is consummated; we have shown and still show that His passion is perpetuated by us and increased by us. He Himself, He who died for us, cannot find a word to say against us on this point; He rather acknowledges by His apostle St. Paul that what we say is the truth: "I have spread My hands to a people that believeth not, and contradicteth Me."¹ Behold, O Jesus, that is the thanks Thou receivest from Thy children whom Thou hast redeemed with so much labor, at the cost of so much blood; the thanks Thou receivest for Thy passion and death! Hast Thou deserved that from us? But Thou didst foresee it all, when the blaspheming Jews cried out to Thee, mocking Thee as Thou didst hang on the cross: "Let Him now come down from the cross, and we will believe Him."² Why didst Thou not come down, as Thou mightest easily have done; and then the Jews at least would have believed in Thee? Why shouldst Thou labor so hard for the redemption of a thankless people, from whom Thou hast nothing to expect but the renewal of Thy sufferings?

O sinners, is it possible? Jesus the eternal Son of God, is dead; He has died for us, and He is so often after His death again nailed to the cross and murdered by us! And we still live! And we are not consumed with repentance and sorrow for our sins! And we do not melt into tears of contrition! Nay, we can even keep altogether from shedding tears. And we can laugh, and seek after pleasure and enjoyment! And we refuse to do penance, and persist in sin, and are determined to offend Him still more! Alas! wo to us if we are not moved by those thoughts, after the death of Christ, after His death has so often been renewed by us. It is a terrible thing, says Origen, nay, it is the very extreme of wickedness, when even the consideration of the passion of Christ is not able to induce us to amend.³

¹ *Expandi manus meas ad populum non credentem, et contradicentem.*—Rom. x. 21.

² *Descendat nunc de cruce, et credimus ei.*—Matt. xxvii. 42.

³ *Hoc est terribile, hoc extremum, cum jam non corrigimur delinquentes.*

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When they
appear be-
fore the tri-
bunal of the
Crucified!

Wo to us, and wo again! To-day we have gained our point, and, as it were, proved contrary to the dying words of the Son of God, that His passion and death are not yet consummated. We have proved this to Him by our past sins, as by so many irrefragable arguments; but the victory will not be always on our side. The hour will come sooner or later, and come it will infallibly (perhaps it is even now at hand for you, for me, for this one or that), when we too shall have to say: It is consummated. Thirty, forty, fifty years have I now lived in the world! It is consummated; there is an end of them! I have one moment left in which I am to give up my soul and to enter on a long eternity. Where are now the honors and dignities, the praise and esteem of men that I struggled so hard for in my ambition? It is consummated! There is an end to them all! Now I bid adieu to them, and leave them to others. What have I now of the money and wealth that I amassed so carefully? Ah! if I had only spent a quarter of the time in heaping up treasures in heaven! It is consummated! I can possess them no longer; I must go hence poor and naked, without taking as much as a farthing with me. Where are now the joys and pleasures that I so often took delight in against my conscience, against my God? It is consummated; they have vanished. Good-bye to everything in the world! I am going away from it! But if I have not duly repented of my sins, whither shall I go? To that tribunal where the God who was crucified for me, and whom I have so often nailed to the cross, awaits me, and where He will no longer, like a meek lamb, appeal to His heavenly Father for me, as He did on the cross: "Father forgive them;" but will be like a lion in the severity of the justice with which He will take revenge on me. Then He too will acknowledge with regard to the joys we had in life: It is consummated; there is an end to them; but at the same time He will show us that all imaginable sorts of pain and anguish are to begin for us and not to be consummated or finished for a long eternity; for, as we during our lives often gave Him up to death in the wantonness of our inordinate desires, so He will deliver us over to the will of the tormentors, the rage of the demons, by the terrible sentence He will thunder forth against us: "Depart from Me you cursed, into everlasting fire!"¹

Confession

Oh, no! crucified Redeemer, No! We will not let it come to

¹ Discedite a me, maledicti, in ignem æternum.—Matt. xxv. 41.

such a pass! Behold in the name of all sinners present, of whom I am the chief, I cast myself down before Thy cross; now while I still see Thy sacred Heart open and ready to receive me, I remember to my great shame and confusion that I have often and grievously offended Thee, my dearest Saviour! O grief! O sorrow! O repentance, fall upon me! Alas! what have I done? I have lost heaven forever for such a wretched thing! Fool that I am! Yet that is not all. I have sold myself to the devil. Nor is that all. I have made choice of the eternal fire of hell. Despairing wretch that I am! even that is not the worst! for in addition to it all, I have despised my sovereign God! Oh, presumptuous sinner that I am! And that God whom I have despised is the same who died on the gibbet for me! O intolerable and monstrous ingratitude! And that God, after He has died for me, I have by my sins again nailed to the cross and murdered! Alas! where shall I find words to describe my wickedness? What more terrible thing can I say of myself? Unnatural monster that I am, I have done to death my God, Him who loved me from eternity, my best and truest Friend, my Saviour and dearest Father! Ye heavens! how have you been able to witness this conduct of mine so long, and with such indifference, that you have not launched your thunder-bolts on me to crush me, the murderer of God? O earth, moistened by the blood of my Redeemer! how hast thou so long supported me on thy surface; how hast thou refrained from swallowing me up, since the divine blood shed by me has so long called for vengeance on me? And Thou, O long-suffering God! how hast Thou given me food and drink, and nourished me so liberally with fatherly care for so many years, in spite of my ingratitude and rage and sins against Thee? Cain slew his brother Abel, and immediately he said to Thee: "Behold, Thou dost cast me out this day from the face of the earth. . . every one therefore that findeth me, shall kill me;"¹ and I still go about with perfect freedom? And Thou dost protect me, after I have so often, as far as in me lay, and with the utmost malice slain my elder brother, by whom I became an adopted child of the heavenly Father? The Jews crucified Thee by their envy and false accusations; but they did not know Thee, as Thou Thyself hast said, nor did they understand what they were doing; and yet, scattered and dispersed as they are throughout the world, they bear on their shoulders the

of past
wickedness.

¹ Ecce efficit me hodie a facie terræ . . . omnis qui invenerit me, occidet me.—Gen. iv. 14.

curse of Thy blood, which they called down on themselves and their children. I have crucified Thee with a full knowledge of Thy divinity; and thus I have caused Thee more pain than the cruel executioners who deprived Thee of Thy natural life. And yet I feel no effect of Thy vengeance for shedding Thy blood. The demons revolted against Thee with but a single thought; they never saw Thee die for them; yet they were at once hurled down into the abyss. So that I am worse than all the demons in hell, for I have in my madness revolted against Thee, not only in thought, but in word and work, twenty, fifty, a hundred, a thousand times, although the faith so often reminded me of the incomprehensible love with which Thou didst redeem me! Oh, what an infinite distance there is between my presumption and Thy goodness! And after having borne with me for so many years, Thou still stretchest forth Thy arms to receive me into grace as Thy dear child, if I will only return to Thee? Still dost Thou call out to me from the cross: "Return!" ah, return to Me, "and I will receive thee;" I will pardon thee; I will forget all thy sins forever.

Sorrow for
past sins,
and purpose
of amend-
ment.

Ye stones and walls of this church! reason have ye to rend yourselves with indignation, if I should fail to be moved when I consider that I have offended such a meek Saviour, such a loving Father! My eyes, for what should you spare your tears, if you have none to shed now? Do you think you will ever have more cause to weep than this? Ah, Jesus! truly my heart is full, even though my eyes refuse to do their office. I am sorry, sorry a thousand times and above all things, that I have ever offended Thee! I can say no more! Alas! It is consummated! Would to God that I had never begun it! Would to God that there was an end now to sin for all time! With Thy help and grace, O Lord, which I beg through the wounds Thou hast received for me, my sins shall be ended from this moment. It is consummated and finished! This firm purpose I place in Thy pierced hand. Now in the hour of Thy death is the time of which the Prophet Daniel spoke: "That transgression may be finished, and sin may have an end, and iniquity may be abolished."¹ Yes, my Saviour whom I now love with all my soul, there shall be an end now to all my sins, and that end shall last till my death! Of my ambition I shall say always: It is consummated! Of my

¹ Ut consummetur prævaricatio, et finem accipiat peccatum, et deleatur iniquitas.—Dan. ix. 24.

unchastity: It is consummated! there is an end to it! Of my anger, hatred, and desire of revenge: It is consummated! Of my drunkenness: It is consummated! Of my habit of cursing: It is consummated! Of my detraction and calumny: It is consummated! there is an end of it! Of my sloth and laziness in Thy service: It is consummated! Never again for all eternity, even if I had to die a thousand times, shall I ever commit a deliberate sin against Thee, my God, who hast died for me! It is consummated! Sin has come to an end! Say all of you to this with a firm will and a contrite heart: Amen! Blessed be Jesus Christ, who died for us! Amen: Amen!

SIXTEENTH SERMON.

ON THE HOPE AND CONVERSION OF THE SINNER IN THE
CONSIDERATION OF THE DEATH OF CHRIST.

Subject.

To-day is the proper time for the conversion and pardon of each and every sinner. For, 1. No sinner is in such a desperate plight as to be unable on this day to be converted and obtain grace; 2. no sinner so reckless but that he should on this day be converted and pray for grace.—*Preached on Good Friday.*

Text.

Jesus autem dicebat: Pater, dimitte illis; non enim sciunt quid faciunt.—Luke xxiii. 34.

“And Jesus said: Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.”

Introduction.

Death is an echo of life. What a man is most accustomed to during life is most apt to occur to his imagination in the hour of death. What was Jesus Christ Our Saviour most accustomed to during His life? What business specially engaged His attention? Read the gospel, the history of His life; there you will see that meekness, goodness, love, and mercy, and that too towards sinners, shone conspicuously above all His works. You will hear the envious Pharisees murmur and complain, saying: “This Man receiveth sinners and eateth with them.”¹ And

¹ Hic peccatores recipit et manducat cum illis.—Luke xv. 2.

therefore they indignantly asked His disciples: Why does your Master, who seems to put on a great appearance of holiness, go so much into the company of publicans and sinners, and actually eat with them? There you will see how He defends against the Pharisees, the notorious sinner Magdalene, who was possessed by seven devils, that is, as St. Gregory explains, by the seven deadly sins. You will see how He protects the adulteress when the Jews wished to stone her, and how He received her in a friendly manner. In a word, wherever He went, publicans and sinners came to meet Him, as the only Refuge where they could find grace and mercy. My dear Christians, things have now come to such a pass that this same Jesus has to die. This is the day of the great tragedy of Mount Calvary, the day on which He ended His life. And what is the first thought that occurs to Him on the occasion? Hear, sinners! and open your anxious hearts to hope and consolation! Hear not my words, but the voice of your Saviour and mine, dying for us, and crying out: "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." Sinners, I now ask you, do your past sins perhaps deprive you of all courage to strive or hope for the eternal joys of heaven? Truly, it is sin alone that closes the way thither; and therefore you have just reason, not only to tremble with fear, but even to despair, if you are minded to persist in sin. But be comforted, if you only really desire to be freed from all guilt. This is the day to which may indeed be applied the words of St. Paul: "Behold, now is the acceptable time; behold, now is the day of salvation."¹ Now that Jesus has died for sinners, and prayed for them before His death, now is the desirable day of salvation, the time of grace and mercy from God! Return now, all of ye that wander away on the road to hell, to everlasting ruin! Two kinds of people who constitute the greater number of sinners, seem to me to answer my invitation in their own way, and to harden their hearts thereto, the first, filled with despair, turn away from me in deep sadness, and sigh forth: Ah, it is too late for me! things have gone too far with me! The others, who form the greater number, look at me quite undisturbed, and with smiling countenances say: Eh! invite as much as you please; it is not yet time for us: it is too soon yet! The former despair and lose heart on account of the number and enormity of their sins, and do not hope for the grace of conversion; the latter presumptuous-

¹ *Ecce nunc tempus acceptabile; ecce nunc dies salutis.*—II. Cor. vi. 2.

ly expect to obtain that grace at their own convenience. Cease then, O dying Saviour, to pray for such sinners! Thy prayers can do them no good. The former cannot, the latter will not profit by them; none of them desire grace or pardon; and I, a poor sinner, can hope to do still less for them by my exhortations. Shall I then give up the matter and not attempt anything? No; Thou, O God of goodness, who dost not wish any one to despair of salvation, wilt by Thy powerful help and grace, for which we humbly beg; by the death Thou hast suffered for us on this day; by Thy sorrowing Mother Mary who stood weeping at the foot of Thy cross up to the hour of Thy death; by Thy angels who wept bitterly at seeing Thee die—Thou wilt effect that what I say shall produce ample fruit among both classes of sinners. Relying on this assistance, I now say in Thy name: Sinners, whoever you be, come with me in thought to Mount Calvary; there we shall fix the eyes of our minds on our dying Redeemer; we shall hear what He has to say; contemplate and consider what He has suffered, and then judge whether or not it is too late or too early for any sinner to be converted and regain the grace of God. That such is not the case we shall see and acknowledge. I repeat the

Plan of Discourse.

To-day is the proper time for all sinners to be converted and obtain pardon. Such is the whole subject. No sinner is in such a desperate condition as not to be able to-day to be converted and regain the grace of God: therefore, great sinners, be not down-hearted; it is not too late, as we shall see in the first part. No sinner should be so presumptuous as not to be converted and beg for grace on this day; therefore, reckless sinners, delay not; it is not too soon for you! the second part. The first shall serve as a consolation, the second as a warning for sinners.

The just who have an earnest will to serve God truly, will find in the first part the consolation that comes from the fact that their past sins which they have repented of, need not make them frightened; from the second part they may learn to be more careful in future in avoiding sin, and to serve till death with all the more zeal and constancy the God who loved us unto death.

To begin at once, and not to waste precious time, tell me, O sinner, no matter how wicked you may be, what are the reasons on account of which you are so pusillanimous, downcast, and de-

The state of sin has no consolation.

spairing about going to heaven, so that you imagine it is now too late for you to repent, to obtain pardon from God for your sins, and to regain His grace? It is true that if you rightly and duly consider the miserable state in which you now are, there is nothing in the world that can give you the least consolation or courage; because to be an enemy of God and an object of the divine anger, while God has it in His power at all times to take full revenge on you; to be a slave and serf of the devil, who only waits for a sign from the Creator to pierce you to the heart and hurry you off with him; to be a child of eternal ruin, to which you banish yourself by despising the divine majesty; to be every moment in danger of death, and consequently to be in constant risk of falling into the pit of hell: what state could be more deplorable, more desperate? How is it possible, ask the holy Fathers in amazement, that while you are in that state you can laugh, eat, drink, and sleep calmly? Truly you have the greatest right to be melancholy, downcast, sad, and despondent, day and night wandering about without rest or ease. Why? On account of the wretched state in which you are. But for that reason too, I now say, you have good cause to be disgusted with that state, to leave it by true repentance, and to return to God and to the right road to heaven.

But it is not without hope of pardon, no matter how bad the sinner is.

Ah, you exclaim, that will do for others! As for me, how can I return to God? If I had committed only one or two sins there might be some chance for me; but, alas! I cannot find a number or limit to my sins. They are too enormous and great for me to dare to hope for pardon, to say nothing of asking God for it! But after all, what are you saying? Suppose that from childhood, from the first moment in which you attained the use of reason, you rebelled against God, and rejected all His laws in the most insulting manner, and despised most wantonly all His graces up to the present moment, so that you have aroused the divine wrath and anger against you to the highest pitch; suppose that you have spent not merely in one vice, but in all imaginable wickedness and abominations the last twenty, thirty, forty, sixty, seventy years, so that your conscience may truly reproach you, as the Prophet Daniel did the unchaste elders: "Oh, thou that art grown old in evil days, now are thy sins come out, which thou hast committed before;"¹ now all the crimes of your

¹ *Inveterate dierum malorum, nunc venerunt peccata tua, quæ operaberis prius.—Dan. xiii. 52.*

life come forth and present themselves to your gaze; truly you are horrified at the sight!

And what does the Almighty say about it all? You have heard His words often from the Prophet Ezechiel: "As I live, saith the Lord God: I desire not the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live."¹ Mark those emphatic words; He does not merely say: I desire not the death of the sinner, but, I desire not the death of the wicked, who on account of his reckless life and inveterate habits of sin, has rejected all faith in and thought of Me, and all fear and love of Me as well; I desire not the death of this wicked man, even if he is the worst and most hardened, but that he be converted to Me, and find eternal life. Is not this assurance from the lips of God Himself enough to give you courage and the hope of regaining His grace? Then tell me: is it not the same God who as long as you live, and in spite of your manifold transgressions, warns you, while you have still a spark of reason left, to be converted, nay, commands and orders you to repent under pain of eternal chastisement? Is it not the same God who calls out, as it were entreatingly, to you and all sinners by the same prophet: "Turn ye, turn ye, from your evil ways; and why will you die?"² Especially since you believe infallibly that I have given My only Son to death that you might obtain eternal life? Do you then wish to set bounds to the infinite mercy and goodness of God, when you allege that there is no hope for you, that it is too late for you to think of conversion? "What is this word?" I must ask you, as the heroic Judith did the cowardly priests in the besieged city of Bethulia: "You have set a time for the mercy of the Lord, and you have appointed Him a day, according to your pleasure." Away with such despairing thoughts which are unworthy of an infinite mercy! "But for as much as the Lord is patient, let us be penitent for this same thing, and with many tears let us beg His pardon."³ Even on account of this infinite patience of God, which you ought to be sufficiently convinced of by His long-suffering in bearing with your many sins, as well as by the sight of His dying Son, even on that account let us bewail our misdeeds, and with humble and contrite hearts beg for mercy, grace, and forgiveness.

Because God has promised him grace when he wishes to repent.

¹ Vivo ego, dicit Dominus Deus: nolo mortem impii, sed ut convertatur impius a via sua, et vivat.—Ezech. xxxiii. 11.

² Convertimini, convertimini a viis vestris pessimis, et quare moriemini?—Ibid.

³ Quod est hoc verbum? Posuistis vos tempus miseracionis Domini, et in arbitrium vestrum diem constitulistis ei. Quia patiens Dominus est, in hoc ipso poeniteamus, et indulgentiam ejus fuis lacrymis postulemus.—Judith viii. 10, 13, 14.

Christ
prayed for
him on the
cross.

But if my words, although they come from the lips of God Himself, if since they are uttered by me, they are too weak to raise your desponding spirits, then come with me in thought to Mount Calvary, where my Saviour and yours, Jesus Christ, hangs on the cross at the last gasp; hear with your own ears what He said when at the point of death; look at Him with the eyes of the mind, and see what He did to give you courage and hope of mercy. In the first place He calls out to His heavenly Father; and what does the dying Son ask of Him? Grace, mercy, pardon for His executioners: "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." Let us consider for a brief space the circumstances in which these words were uttered. How, when, in what manner did Christ say this prayer? And mark well that these were the first words that He spoke from the cross; before comforting His afflicted Mother; before recommending to her the beloved disciple; before desiring a drink in His intolerable thirst; before representing to His Father the awful desolation from which He suffered; before giving up the ghost into the hands of His Father, His first care was for His tormentors; and in their persons for all sinners; "Father, forgive them!" Thus He shows what a deep hold sinners have on His heart, and how great is His wish and desire that they should not be lost; for their salvation is, so to speak, more weighty in His sight than the care of His dearest disciple; more weighty than His beloved Mother, than His own tormentors, nay, than His own soul.

And that
too while
His enemies
were treat-
ing Him
most
cruelly.

When did He utter that prayer? We men, no matter how good and kind may be our dispositions, do not easily pardon and do good to those who are actually injuring us; we wait awhile until the injury has passed by, and our enemy has ceased to rage against us, thus giving ourselves time to cool down a little in our anger, although some resentment may remain smouldering in us for some time longer. Not so is it with the meek Jesus, who had such a care for the salvation of the world. At the very time when the tormentors were actually engaged in the work of putting Him to death, while He was being blasphemed, mocked, sneered at by the high-priests, scribes, executioners, and all the people present; while He was actually listening to the scornful words: If Thou be the Son of God, come down from the cross! He helped others, now the poor fool cannot help Himself! even while the soldiers were casting lots for His garments, when the pain and shame He was enduring had reached their highest pitch;

circumstances in which an Elias would have cried out in a still more fiery access of zeal: "Let fire come down from heaven and consume thee and thine;"¹ circumstances in which an Eliseus would have urged on the bears more fiercely against the boys who mocked him; circumstances in which a Zacharias would have cried out still more loudly, as he did when they were slaying him: "The Lord see, and require it:"² in these circumstances, I say, hanging by the nails to the cross, forgetting as it were the bitter pains He was suffering, and when we men would do nothing but sigh and moan and weep, He opens His mouth and cries out to God for mercy and pardon for His tormentors: Forgive them! For His enemies were hastening down to hell, and Jesus was still endeavoring to save them, and reconcile them with His Eternal Father. All His limbs were fastened to the cross, and violently racked and disjoined; He could no longer spread out His mantle over the wicked ones to hide them from His Father's wrath; He could not hold His hands over them, for those hands were nailed to the shameful tree; His tongue and mouth alone were at liberty, and with them, tortured as He was with thirst, He seeks to obtain grace for sinners at the last moment. Just like that celebrated soldier of Athens, who when the Medes were conquered in battle, and had taken refuge in a ship, held it fast to the shore with his right hand, lest they might escape, and when they cut off the right hand he held fast with the left, and when that too was cut off, he grasped the side of the vessel in his teeth. In the same way it seems to me did Christ Our Saviour act towards His foes in order to keep them with Himself, that they might not be lost forever.

In what manner did He pray? Father, He cried out to Heaven, Father, forgive them! When complaining afterwards of His weariness and desolation, He said: "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?"³ Now when praying for sinners, He uses that sweetest name of Father, which when spoken by a beloved child is apt at once to make an impression on the father's heart. In order then to move the Almighty all the more to mercy and pardon, He says: Father, forgive them. As if He wished to say: Show Thyself now, not as the Almighty God, not as the sovereign Lord, not as the stern Judge, but as a mild and loving Father; for all a Father's goodness is required to for-

He prayed most efficaciously.

¹ Descendat ignis de caelo, et devoret te et tuos.—IV. Kings i. 10.

² Videat Dominus, et requirat.—II. Paral. xxiv. 22.

³ Deus meus, Deus meus, ut quid dereliquisti me?—Matt. xxvii. 46.

give such a terrible sin. If they have not deserved that Thou shouldst overlook their malice, then look at Me, Thy Son! Here I am hanging on the cross in mid-air, My eyes dimmed by the near approach of death; I have done all that Thy holy will required Me to do and to suffer; I have been obedient unto death. Now hear the last favor Thy dying Son desires of Thee: Father, forgive them! As to Myself, although I feel the pain and shame they are even now inflicting on Me, yet I have forgiven them. Do Thou too forgive them; this is all I ask of Thee; do as I have done! Could He have offered up a more powerful or earnest prayer?

Alleging
a reason
why His
Father
should par-
don sinners.

Finally, that He may be certain of obtaining His petition, He puts forward the motive for which it should be granted all the more easily: "For they know not what they do." Truly Jesus could not excuse the manifest injustice of Pilate, who had condemned Him to death against his own better knowledge and conscience, through sheer human respect and the fear of men; nor the envy of the high-priests, who had delivered Him up to the Judges; nor the malice of the witnesses, who had falsely accused Him; nor the cruelty of the soldiers, who had scourged Him far more severely than the Judge's orders warranted, and who had moreover in their wanton barbarity crowned Him with thorns; nor the ingratitude of the people, who after all the benefits they had received from Him, cried out: crucify Him; all this indeed He could not excuse, but He acted as we do when we wish to exculpate or protect another; we say nothing of what does not answer our purpose. Hence He alleged their ignorance. But, O dear Lord, did they not know what they were doing? Could and should they not have known that Thou art the Son of God? Thou hadst already said of them, before they reached the acme of their malice and took measures to put Thee to death: "If I had not come and spoken to them, they would not have sin: but now they have no excuse for their sin."¹ It is true, my dear brethren, that their ignorance was crass, affected, and culpable, such as is that of many Christians nowadays, who allege all sorts of empty excuses for the abuses they indulge in, refuse to settle reasonable doubts, and do not wish to know or to acknowledge the truth, lest they should be compelled to abstain from what they wish to do. Meanwhile the most loving Saviour not

¹ Si non venissem, et locutus fuisset eis, peccatum non haberent: nunc autem excusationem non habent de peccato suo.—John xv. 22.

finding any better defence for His tormentors, puts forward as a last resource their ignorance, gross and blamable as it was, to show His great desire to save them from everlasting death: "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."

Cowardly, despairing Christians, what are your feelings when you consider this? You reckon yourselves in the number of the persecutors of Christ, and you are right! For according to the words of St. Paul, by every mortal sin we commit, we again, as far as we can, crucify the Son of God. But do you now think it too late to hope that God will pardon you your past offences, although this pardon was asked in such a fervent prayer and entreaty as a last favor by the dying Saviour from His heavenly Father? Whose prayer, as the same apostle writes, being then offered for all sinners who wish to be converted, "was heard for His reverence."¹ Do you wish a proof of this? Then hear the words of Jesus to the thief at His side, who begged Him only to remember him: "Lord, remember me when Thou shalt come into Thy kingdom. And Jesus said to him: Amen, I say to thee, this day thou shalt be with Me in paradise."² You have robbed your own soul of divine grace, and murdered it, and perhaps the souls of many others too by treachery, flattery, and scandal-giving; but even so, do you think it is too late for you to obtain grace, although that robber, who had been wicked all his life long, gained paradise in his last moments? What sin can be so great as to exclude all hope of mercy, when the actual murder of the Son of God finds an advocate and defendant in that same God?

No sinner then should despair of pardon.

Sinner, if the words of the Saviour crying out for pardon for you find no entrance into your heart to give you courage and inspire you with a hope of the grace that is ready for you, then open, I beseech you, your eyes; see for yourself what Jesus has done and suffered for you, to do penance in your stead, and to pay the debt contracted by your sins to His angry Father. Consider the wounds received for you from the crown of His head to the sole of His foot; count the drops of blood He shed for you; see the heart that was pierced for you, the arms extended wide to receive you; reflect on the death suffered for you, and then ask yourself with St. Bernard: will the Lord who loved me so much and sought me with so much toil reject me if I return to

Especially as Christ suffered so much for him.

¹ Exanditus est pro sua reverentia.—Heb. v. 7.

² Domine, memento mei, cum veneris in regnum tuum. Et dixit illi Jesus: Amen dico tibi, hodie mecum eris in paradiso.—Luke xxiii. 42.

Him? ¹ He who thus gave up His life for me to save me from the flames of hell, will He now condemn and cast me off when I wish to do penance? No, sinner; no matter how wicked you may be, be of good heart; it is not too late for you! It is true that you have often and grossly offended your God; but it is also true that the Son of God died for you. It is true that you of yourself do not deserve grace; but it is also true that the wounds of Christ can merit grace for you. If your sins cry out to Heaven for vengeance, the blood of Christ cries out still more loudly for mercy and pardon. If the heavy load of your sins weighs you down to hell, the far heavier weight of the death of Christ will lift you up on high again. If, like the debtor in the gospel, you owe the divine justice many millions, and have not a farthing wherewith to pay, Jesus becomes your bail, and one drop of His blood is able to pay to His Father infinitely more than the debts contracted by the sins of the whole world, even if they were endless in number.

And left
him Him-
self as a
satisfaction
for sin.

This infinite atonement He has left to you and me in the sacrament of Penance; and if you wish to avail yourself of it, you can fully satisfy the claims of the divine justice. "Receive Me, and give Me for thyself;" ² such are the words in which St. Augustine represents Our Lord as speaking to the pusillanimous sinner. Poor debtor! have you not the means of paying? Then see here: I am altogether at your service; receive Me, and give Me for thyself. If you think I am not enough to pay for all your sins, then come here, "Put in thy finger hither, and see My hands, and bring hither thy hand and put it into My side;" ³ as He said formerly to the incredulous Thomas. See the marks of the nails, and the wounds of My whole body! The wounds of your soul are indeed many and hideous; but one of the least of Mine is more than enough to cleanse and heal them all. Hideous and unclean have been the thoughts that ran through your head; but one of the thorns that pierced My head is more than enough to purge away all that filth. You have sinned with your eyes; one of the tears that flowed from Mine is more than enough to wash away all those sins. You have sinned with your ears; one insult of those that offended Mine is more than enough to make good all your faults. You have sinned with your foul, profane, detracting

¹ Numquid eum, quem Dominus quæsit, venientem ejectionem foras?

² Accipe me, et da pro te.

³ Infer digitum tuum huc, et vide manus meas, et affer manum tuam, et mitte in latus meum.—John 21. 27.

tongue; My silence when I was accused and condemned is more than enough to atone for all your wicked talk. You have sinned with your mouth by immoderate eating and drinking; one drop of the gall and vinegar given Me to drink is more than enough to make good all your gluttony and intemperance. You have sinned and given many an occasion of sin to others by vanity and indecency in dress; the torn purple garment that was put on My body by way of derision and mockery can more than sufficiently cover those sins. You have sinned by your thievish and unchaste hands; one of the nails that pierced Mine is more than enough to pay those debts of yours. You have sinned by envy, hatred, and vindictive desires in your heart; My heart opened for you is more than able to atone for those sins. You have sinned by your wanton flesh; is not My body torn and mangled all over more than able to atone for your wickedness? In a word, each and every sin, no matter how grievous, how enormous, will find in Me abundant satisfaction and atonement. Receive Me, and give Me for thyself; offer Me altogether to My Father as satisfaction. Say to Him: there Thou hast everything; there Thou hast infinitely more than I ever owed Thee!

Ah, this one thought was enough to console St. Augustine whenever the devil tried to bring him to despair by reminding him of the number and wickedness of his past sins. Ah, he sighs forth, with reason might I despair on account of my numerous sins and infinite negligences; but I do not dare to despair, because when we are enemies, we have been reconciled by the death of Thy Son: for all my hope and the whole foundation of my security is in His precious blood, which was shed for us and for our salvation. That very blood, the nails, and the lance call out to me, no matter how great a sinner I am, that I am reconciled to Christ, although I have long persecuted Him, provided I only love Him with my whole heart in future.¹ In those terms St. Augustine encourages himself, and you too, great sinners, if you are minded to be converted. It is not too late for you; to-day is the time; do not wait in your despair until the time is past, and you will have to say in truth: now it is too late; when that blood of Jesus Christ that was shed for you, and now cries out for mercy in

This consideration should comfort sinners, as it did St. Augustine

¹ Desperare utique potuissem, propter nimia peccata mea, et infinitas negligentias meas; sed desperare jam non audeo, quia cum inimici essemus, reconciliati sumus per mortem Filii tui; omnis namque spes, et totius fiduciae certitudo mihi est in pretioso sanguine ejus, qui effusus est propter nos, et propter salutem nostram. Clavi et lancea clamant mihi, quod vere reconciliatus sum Christo, si eum amavero.—S. Aug. Med. c. 10.

your behalf, will be then cast in your face, and all His wounds shall say to you: we offered you mercy and pardon, but you would not accept.

Contrition
and con-
fiding
prayer for
pardon.

No! Rather come now and say with penitent hearts with me, who can well exclaim in the words of St. Paul: "Christ Jesus came into this world to save sinners, of whom I am the chief."¹ O dying Jesus! comfort and consolation of my fearful, anxious heart! I acknowledge that I have often and grievously sinned, and my conscience is therefore filled with fear, distrust, and apprehension. I deserve nothing but to be cast away from Thee forever into hell! Nor could I dare to form any hope of heaven, or to lift up my eyes to Thee lest I should receive the reward due to me; but I cast my eyes on Thy cross as on the sole anchor of my hope. Let those despair who do not believe in Thee; but how could such despair enter into my soul, since I am infallibly certain that Thou hast died for me? What wound can be so deadly as not to be healed by Thy death? If Thou wishest to destroy me, one angry glance of Thine would be enough to slay me at once. But Thou hast changed the throne of Thy divine majesty for this shameful gibbet of the cross; and why? To show me, not the severity of Thy justice, but Thy mildness and superabundant mercy. Show this now in me; prove that Thy outstretched arms have not less power to receive the penitent sinner who humbly bewails his transgressions, than to punish the sinner who persists in wickedness and will not hear of repenting. I, O dearest Saviour, now turn to Thee; I will do penance and amend my life! Do Thou only call out for me once more to-day: Father, forgive him; forgive this poor sinner, for he knew not what he was doing! And so it is. I knew not then what a great, almighty, omnipresent, all-seeing God most worthy of love, I was offending so grievously! I was blind and knew it not; I could not see into what an abyss of evils I was hurling myself, when for the sake of a momentary pleasure, or to please some mortal, or to gain some trifling thing, I so often bartered heaven for the eternal pains of hell. Father, I now cry out with Thy crucified Son, forgive me! I have sinned, and I am sorry for it! I have sinned against Heaven and before Thee; I am not worthy to be called Thy son; yet is Thy Son worthy that at His prayer Thou shouldst admit me again into the number of Thy children. My debts have increased indeed beyond all limit,

¹ Christus Jesus venit in hunc mundum peccatores salvos facere, quorum primus ego sum. —I. Tim. 1. 15.

and it is not in my power to make Thee the least payment; yet have patience with me, and I will pay Thee all! Behold Thy Son, my Saviour; He has given Himself altogether to me; Him do I now give back to Thee, and in future by the frequent reception of the holy sacraments I will give Him to Thee often in complete and superabundant atonement for all my offences! If Thou shouldst now call me into eternity after having done penance, ah, I shall indeed appear bare and naked of merits in Thy sight; yet by the reception of the holy sacraments I shall clothe myself with the infinite merits of Thy Son. If my undergarments, that is, my own merits, are now poor and ragged, yet is my mantle beautiful and costly, and worthy to appear in Thy presence. With this hope, this consolation, I will in future live for Thee alone, and if it please Thee, for Thee alone will I die. Amen. But wait! There are others for whom the same resolution is necessary! I am speaking of you, reckless sinners, who are not yet earnestly minded to change your wicked lives, but think that it is somewhat too soon for you to repent. Even for you it is high time to-day to be converted from your hearts, to beg of God to pardon your sins, and to make an earnest resolution never more to offend Him, as we shall see in the second part; and before entering on it we shall again beg the light of the Holy Ghost by a devout Pater and Ave.

Second Part.

Tell us then what your intentions are. Do you perhaps think it too late for you to be converted, so that you despair of obtaining the necessary grace? No, they say; such an idea never entered into our heads. God forbid that we should despair! We know that the sinner who wishes to repent is never rejected by the merciful God. We too wish to repent; but not yet. Jesus on the cross awaits us with outstretched arms; we shall cast ourselves into these arms; but not yet. We are kept back by the world and its joys, by the delights of the flesh, by the love of that person with whom we live, by human respect and other worldly motives; so that we shall wait awhile longer. Our evil inclinations will grow weak in time; and then we shall change our lives. On this sacred day of sorrow we shall abstain from sin, and fast till late in the evening; but after Easter we shall live as usual. It is rather too soon for us to commence a serious change for the better. Such is the tune of most sinners,

The hateful presumption of the sinner in refusing to be converted appears from what Christ suffered.

and the only echo of it is, generally speaking, a hardening in wickedness, an unprovided or impenitent death, and following thereon, eternal damnation. Hell is full of people of that kind, and there is hardly any Christian in hell who had not the same intention, and who did not say to himself: I will do penance and amend, but not now. But I do not intend to terrify them to-day with these considerations. Sinners! reckless sinners! where and when do you dare to make that resolution? Where? Before your crucified Saviour; before the God who died for you on the cross? When? On that very day which reminds you in the most emphatic manner of the bitter passion and painful death He endured for you. And in such a place, on such a day you pretend that it is too soon for you to change your lives, give up sin, and honestly and truly be converted to God? What do you mean? Explain yourselves now publicly in presence of the dying Jesus. You mean then to say: let the wounds of Jesus remain open; let all the blood flow from them; let Him hang on the gibbet and call out to us to be converted and have mercy on Him; we have resolved for some time longer, perhaps for several years, to continue that free, easy, scandalous, wicked, and sinful life that continues to reopen His wounds, to drain His blood, to renew daily His painful death! Shame on you! What an inhuman, cruel, impious resolution for you to make! Think of what Jesus suffered before His death, and answer the different points I shall now lay before you; answer, not me, but yourselves and your Redeemer.

In the Garden of Gethsemani.

In the Garden, the Life of the world, the Joy of the angels was sorrowful unto death. Why? That you might restrain by true contrition of heart and the blessed sorrow of repentance those unlawful indulgences of your wicked and dissolute lives. Is it still too soon for you to think of doing this? The dread of the terrible and shameful death that was in store for Him caused Our Saviour to sweat blood from every pore of His body, and yet He resolved to endure it all for you and your salvation, so that you might earnestly resolve to overcome the difficulties that lie in the way of your conversion. Is it still too soon for you to do that? Through greed one of His own disciples sold and betrayed Him; He suffered that to induce you to moderate your greed of gain, and to restore that for which you have so often sold your souls to the devil, and which you know you possess without a just title. Is it too soon for you to do that? He was bound

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with chains and ropes like a thief, that you might rend the bonds of your sins and return to the freedom of the children of God. Is it too soon for you to do so?

Jesus was dragged to all the tribunals and decried by false accusations as a traitor, a seducer, a blasphemer, that you might abstain from all hatred and envy in your conversation, from the hateful habit of cursing and swearing, from calumny and detraction; and that you might make due reparation for any harm done your neighbor's good name. Is it too soon for you to do that? Jesus was accused and condemned through sheer envy, hatred, and human respect, that you, setting aside all undue fear and favor, might observe and protect the ends of justice in all your business and dealings, in the management of the property of others, in giving advice and pronouncing judgment. Is it too soon for you to make atonement for the sins you have committed in this respect? Jesus was torn and mangled in His whole body, that you might deny your flesh those unlawful pleasures that rob you of reason, that trample under foot all laws, human and divine, that harden your wills, so that you prefer your brutish lusts that entail the loss of a happy and the imminent danger of an unhappy eternity, a perishable beauty, the soul-killing love of some wretched creature; you prefer that to the blood and wounds of your Saviour, and for the sake of it you are ready daily to reopen and renew those wounds, to shed that blood. Is it too soon for you to give up that vice which at last brings on obduracy and final impenitence? Jesus was crowned with thorns and derided as a mock king, clad in an old purple garment, and mocked at as a fool in a white robe, that you might set bounds to your extravagance in dress, which is the cause of that vanity and worldly pride so hateful to God, and moreover often brings poverty on your children, gives bad example, excites others to imitate you, scandalizes souls, and is the cause of many vices. Is it too soon for you to live according to Christian humility, without which you cannot get to heaven? Jesus remained still amid all the insults and revilings that were so publicly vomited forth against Him, that you might bear injuries meekly, curb all desire of revenge, and at last live in peace and harmony with those whom you have so long looked on with an eye of hatred. Is it too soon for you to do that?

Jesus voluntarily took up the weight of His cross, and carried it to the top of Mount Calvary, saying to you at the same time

Before His Judges.

In carrying the cross.

and in the
crucifixion.

in tones of entreaty: "If any man will come after Me" to heaven, "let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily;"¹ that at last you might lay down the unhappy burden of your sins, which all this time has prevented you from gaining heaven by the crosses and trials you have had to bear; and that in future you being in the state of grace might make profit of your sufferings for the good of your souls, and with patience and resignation of your will to the will of God bear for His sake the crosses He may be pleased to send you. Is it too soon for you to do that? He was nailed to the cross with the utmost torment, and raised in the air, that you might before His cross turn aside from your vicious ways; that with St. Paul you might nail to the cross those sinful desires that fixed Jesus to it, and never again abandon the feet of the Crucified to return to the ways of sin? Is it too soon for you to promise this earnestly to your dying Lord, to make a firm resolution to that effect, to shed a few tears of contrition as a return for the blood He shed for you. Ah, sinners, Jesus must suffer as long as you are pleased to continue in sin!

He prays on
the cross
for the con-
version of
sinners by
way of con-
solation.

Hear what He says to you just before His death in His last and therefore most impressive words. The three first words He spoke on the cross are for the down-hearted and despairing; the four last for you, reckless sinners! "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?"² Such is the complaint He addresses to His heavenly Father. The Son of God is dying in complete desolation; He is, as it were, forgotten in His death by His heavenly Father, and no longer recognized because He is covered with the abominations of your sins. While dying thus disconsolate, He calls out to you from the cross in the words of the desolate Job, who spoke in His person, "Have pity on me, have pity on me, at least you my friends;"³ at least you, My Christians and dearest friends, for whom I willingly endure this shameful and painful death. And in such circumstances is it still too soon for you to blot out all those abominations by His blood which He offers you for that purpose; and by your repentance to give Him the consolation which alone He sought for in all His sufferings? He cries out again, and shows the ardor of His longings: "I thirst;"⁴ name-

¹ Si quis vult post me venire, abneget semetipsum, et tollat crucem suam quotidie.—Luke ix. 23.

² Deus meus, Deus meus, ut quid dereliquisti me?—Matt. xxvii. 46.

³ Miseremini mei, miseremini mei, saltem vos, amici mei.—Job xix. 21.

⁴ Sitio.—John xix. 28.

ly, for the salvation of your souls; and will you continue to press to His lips the chalice of Babylon, full of the filth of all kinds of vices, among which is drunkenness, the source of so many sins? Is it too soon for you men, Christians, to refresh Him with tears of repentance? Will you allow your Redeemer to be consumed with thirst, and to die of it, without showing Him any pity or mercy, as long as it pleases you? Will you still continue to drink down iniquity like water, as holy Job says: "Who drinketh iniquity like water?"¹ At last He says: "It is consummated!"² Let Me now die without tormenting Me any more; all is accomplished that the justice of My Father and the cruelty of men could invent; it is consummated! And while He says that, you wish to disprove the truth of His words, since it is too soon for you to abstain from sin. And therefore you are still minded to renew daily His torments. "Father," He sighs at last, "into Thy hands I commend My spirit."³ "And saying this He gave up the ghost;"⁴ with head bowed down towards you, that you too may give up into His hands by a happy death your spirit renewed by true contrition. Is it too soon for you to lay hand to this work which is so necessary, and to think of the dying exhortation of your Lord? Perhaps you hold in your hands a key by which you can open or shut at will the gate on the approach of death? And when is it too soon for you to repent? Even now, while you are actually contemplating Jesus before your eyes, Jesus who died that you might die to sin, serve Him faithfully in future, and afterwards live forever with Him in His kingdom of heaven.

Sinners, have you a human heart that is still capable of being moved? If so, then I ask you further, in what place do you form this resolution of not yet leaving off sin? Where? On Mount Calvary where we have been in thought during our meditation; in that place where on this day the most powerful incentive is offered you to repent. What can move a human heart to repent is either the goodness of God through love, or His strict justice through fear; now, where has God ever given such evidence of these two attributes, as on this day on Mount Calvary? Could we hope for or imagine a greater goodness and love, than that the Son of the eternal God should give His life for us, and that

The love of Christ for us should move them to conversion.

¹ *Bibit quasi aquam iniquitatem.*—Job xv. 16.

² *Consummatum est.*—John xix. 30.

³ *Pater, in manus tuas commendo spiritum meum.*—Luke xxiii. 46.

⁴ *Et hæc dicens, expiravit.*—Ibid.

too in such a terrible manner? Eh! what need is there of words, since the fact itself speaks only too clearly? That God drew us forth out of nothing, says St. Chrysostom, meditating on the death of Christ, that He built up heaven to be our eternal dwelling place, that He deputed the angels to be our guardians and ministers, that He gave us such superabundant means of securing our salvation, shows a great love and generosity on His part that we do not deserve; but none of all these gifts, none of all the others that can be imagined represents the greatness and immensity of the divine love so clearly as the cross on which we behold the Son of God dying for our sins. O sinners, what return will you make for that infinite love? Ah, whatever you can do with your wealth and property in His service is far too little; with your blood and life, if you had a thousand million of lives to lose, you could not make an adequate return for His love. What return then can you make? Your love. This alone is what He seeks; with this alone is He satisfied. And is it too soon for you to love Him? And will you still continue to hate, offend, and persecute One who loves you so much and gives you so many good gifts? Ah! Christ Jesus, must Thou then patiently stand and look on while a mass of corruption, a miserable piece of flesh, a brutal lust, a handful of gain is more valued by men than Thou and the infinite love Thou hast shown them? Men, do I say? Monsters rather should they be called, more cruel than the wild beasts that can at least be won over by kindness!

And also
the fear of
God's strict
justice,
shown on
this day:
explained by
a parable.

Have you then cast off all sense of decency, since you can no longer be moved by love? Then be terrified at least, and tremble with fear at the proof of the divine justice given you and me on this day on Mount Calvary. The eternal fire of hell, in which the just God condemns the soul made to His own image, to be burnt forever without mercy on account of even one mortal sin, is, I confess, a terrible thing; but it is only a shadow in comparison with the strict justice that the Almighty took this day on His own innocent Son in order to atone for the sins of others. Wait a little, sinners! That you may understand this better, I will explain it to you by a parable that I related to you some years ago. Four thieves had been committing their depredations for some time in a certain country, and finding that they had become too notorious, they determined to go to the neighboring town to carry on their thefts there. On approaching the town, they saw the body of a beautiful young man magnificent-

ly dressed hanging on a gallows before the gate. Struck with amazement they asked a citizen who happened to pass by who the young man was. He, was the answer, was the only son of the judge of our town. More astonished than ever, they asked further who had caused him to be executed. His own father, was the answer. His own father! and what crime had he committed? I will tell you, said the citizen: a servant of our judge had committed a theft, and was imprisoned and kept in confinement until the final sentence of death should be passed on him. The son, who loved the servant, tried to obtain his freedom, and offered himself as bail for him in case the servant should try to escape. The latter, finding a favorable opportunity, got off out of prison, and thus the son, innocent as he was, had to suffer in his stead; for the father being, as you can easily see, a strict judge, insisted on his paying the penalty of the bail he had given. Oho! thought the thieves, this is no place for us! Comrade, said one to the other, let us get away as quickly as possible! The judge is too strict for us. If he catches us in the act, what will he not do to us, since he has not spared even his own son, but hanged him on a gallows for the theft committed by a servant? I think the best thing for us is to give up thieving altogether. This conclusion was suggested to those rogues by the light of reason alone, and they reformed their lives in consequence.

There is no doubt as to the meaning of this parable. Sinner, are you still minded to persist in your evil ways? Do you intend to commit even one more mortal sin? Where do you come to that determination? In the place where, with the eyes of the mind, you are actually looking on a Man cruelly treated, murdered, and bathed in His blood before the gate of the city of Jerusalem, and hanging on a gibbet? Ask who He is. He is the only-begotten, most beautiful, infinitely loved, eternal Son of God. Who has thus executed Him? His own heavenly Father, as the Apostle assures us: "Whom God hath proposed to be a propitiation, through faith in His blood, to the showing of His justice."¹ Why? What fault had He committed? Adam, a servant of God, had committed a theft in paradise by eating an apple contrary to the divine command. This divine Son became a bail for him, and took his debts on Himself; since the servant could not pay, God seized upon His own Son who had under-

Which the sinner has to fear.

¹ Quem proposuit Deus propitiationem, per fidem in sanguine ipsius, ad ostensionem justitiæ suæ.—Rom. iii. 25.

taken to pay the debt, and had Him executed: "For the wickedness of My people have I struck Him,"¹ He says by the Prophet Isaias. Before His death, this Son, prostrate on the ground, begged of His Father: "My Father, if it be possible, let this chalice pass from Me."² But no! The justly wrathful Father was not to be appeased; the Son was shown no mercy, and had to die. What are your feelings now when considering this? O miserable, blind mortal that you are, if you do not now commence to tremble! Ah, think of it! Truly it is not advisable to commit even one sin more; and it is high time indeed to change for the better. "For if in the green wood they do these things," as the Saviour said on His way to Calvary, "what shall be done in the dry?"³ If the fruitful tree is cast into the fire, what will become of the barren and useless one, unless it at once begins to bear fruit? If God did not pardon His Son, what vengeance will He not take on the servant? If He caused His innocent Son to be crucified and put to death for the sins of others, how will He act towards me, wicked mortal that I am, on account of my own sins, if I do not repent in time? If a divine Person of infinite perfection had to be chastised in the human nature He assumed, because He thus put on the mere appearance of a sinner, what have I, miserable man, to expect, from whom God has no good to hope for, no evil to fear, after having so often and grievously offended Him, if I do not at once amend my life? And you, presumptuous sinner, are you still minded to persist in the evil of your ways, to commit that sin for the atonement of which the Son of God was put to death? Is it still too soon for you to give up your wicked ways? "Oh, infinite," exclaims St. Thomas of Villanova, "is the audacity of the sinner who does not hesitate to sin after having beheld such a tragic sight!"⁴ Ah, think well of what you are doing! It is high time for a change! Behold now is the acceptable time, behold now is the day of salvation; now is the day for you to return with contrite hearts, with wills determined never more to commit sin; for the most powerful motives, the love and goodness and also the strict justice of God urge you violently to this.

He should
tremble at
the thought

Will you not yet make up your mind? Is it still too soon for you? Then go where your unbridled desires carry you. Go

¹ Propter scelus populi mei percussit eum. —Is. liii. 8.

² Pater mi, si possibile est, transeat a me calix iste. —Matt. xxvi. 39.

³ Quia si in viridi ligno hæc faciunt, in arido quid fiet? —Luke xxiii. 31.

⁴ O infinitam peccatoris audaciam, qui post tale spectaculum, peccare non formidat.

and commit that sin that you will not give up. But how? Hear now the last question that I have to put to you. How and in what manner will you commit that sin? I will tell you. Hear what Father Paul Segneri says about it. A good and pious maiden who had long been persecuted by the unwelcome attentions of one who sought to commit sin with her, at last on the suggestion of her guardian angel bethought her of the following rather unusual and daring though efficacious means of ridding herself of her persecutor. The next time she saw him coming, she took the crucifix in her hands and placed it across the threshold of her bed-room: Shameless wretch, she then cried out in a voice of thunder, not at all resembling that of a woman, are you there again? Come now and accomplish your wicked purpose; I will not refuse you; but look first at the way that leads you to the crime you meditate. You must trample on your Saviour and mine, who was crucified for us, before you can enter the room. If you dare to do that, come on! Dissolute and wicked as the young man was, the sound of the maiden's voice and the sight of the crucifix so terrified and changed him, that he began to tremble with fear and dread, and covered with confusion, threw himself down on the ground, begged pardon, and promised amendment.

of tramp-
ling on the
Crucified.
Shown by
an example.

Sinners! If any of those present are, as I hope not, still minded to defer conversion, do you know what I would wish to do? I would follow the example of that courageous maiden, and before you leave the church, close all the doors except one; on the threshold of that I would place the crucifix, and with tears of blood, if I had such at my command, I would cry out to you: Go, ye wretches! go and do what you intend in your recklessness! but look down first and see the way you have to pass over before consummating your guilt. There lies at your feet Jesus your Saviour, who on this day redeemed you by His life's blood! He will one day be your Judge, and in the valley of Josaphat will pronounce on you the sentence either of life or of death; He will say to you either: "Come, ye blessed," or, "Depart, you cursed." Consider Him well! You cannot otherwise carry out your wicked designs than by trampling on His sacred wounds and on the heart that was pierced for you! Why do you delay? Go on boldly if you have the heart to do it! Dare you do it? Then I will take the crucifix and follow you, and with it block the way to that house in which after Easter you mean again to visit that person in order to gratify your unlawful lusts; I will follow you into that ale-

Which he
must do if
he persists
in sin.

house where you intend to drink to intoxication; I will follow you into that company in which you are minded to carry on unchaste or uncharitable conversation; I will go with you on the way you intend to follow in order to take vengeance on your neighbor, or to stretch out your thievish hands to acquire an unjust gain; I will go with you to the confessional where you intend this Easter telling your sins, but as you have not the firm purpose of amendment, telling them without true contrition; I will go with you to the Table of the Lord, where you intend to receive the Bread of angels into your sacrilegious soul; to the altar, if you are priests, where you profane the flesh and blood of the Lord with unchaste hands! There I will again cry out to you: Look at whom you are trampling on! You have Jesus Christ lying at your feet; He is to be the footstool you are to use to carry out your wicked will; there is no other way for you. Go on then, if you will; accomplish what you have in your minds to do. Christians, what think you of this? If I were to do this as I say, would you still venture to sin? But you must know that although I cannot and will not thus place in your way a wooden crucifix; still you cannot commit a sin, unless as far as in you lies, you trample under foot the Son of God your Saviour, who is now reigning in glory in heaven, and become the companion of those of whom the Apostle writes: "How much more, do you think he deserveth worse punishments, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath esteemed the blood of the testament unclean, by which he was sanctified?"¹

Repentance
and purpose
of amend-
ment.

Truly I think that this consideration must at last soften your hearts and inspire you with better sentiments. Come then with me; let us with that young man fall at the feet of the crucified Lord, and humbly beg of Him to forgive us for our past wicked recklessness. Christ Jesus! dearest Saviour, behold now at Thy feet him who has so often and shamefully insulted Thee! Ah, where have my unbridled desires carried me? The bitter death Thou hast suffered for me has at last opened my eyes, so that I must acknowledge how guiltily I have acted towards Thee, how incomprehensively grievous is any offence offered Thee. Ah, if I had thought of this sooner, would it have been possible for me to sin so often, and for the sake of some miserable thing to trample on Thee and Thy precious blood? I tremble when I think of it!

¹ Quanto magis putatis deteriora mereri supplicia, qui Filium Dei conculcaverit, et sanguinem testamenti pollutum duxerit, in quo sanctificatus est?—Heb. x. 29.

I have been worse than the very demons! Would Lucifer himself have dared to rise in rebellion against Thee, if he had seen Thee dying on a cross for him? But I have by the true faith seen Thee thus dying for my sake, and yet I have not given up sin! And is it still too soon for me to think of doing so? Ah, my God! much too soon did I begin to offend Thee when I committed my first sin; never should I have begun to disobey Thee. Late, O Jesus, have I loved, I now cry out with St. Augustine. I am sorry a thousand times, and execrate my ingratitude and presumption! No; it is not too soon; this very day shall see the beginning of my sincere and lasting conversion. No more shall I say as I have hitherto said: After Easter I will venture to sin again. No; with the help of Thy grace that shall happen no more. Here before Thy cross I lay aside all wish to sin; here I renounce forever the vanity of the wicked world, which has hitherto displeased Thee in me; here I lay down all ill-gotten goods with the firm resolution of making restitution; here I say good-bye forever to that person, to all creatures who have ever taken my heart away from Thee; here I give up all my wicked habits of cursing, drinking to excess, speaking impurely and uncharitably. Now will I begin another life. No sin, no more sin for me on any account whatever! Truly will I love Thee as long as the breath is in my body, and love Thee all the more ardently, the more I know I have offended Thee! Thee alone will I love above all things, who hast loved me even to death! And finally I beg of Thee, O Jesus! by this death of Thine, keep by Thy grace this resolution firm and constant in me and in all men till death. Amen.

ON THE GRAVE OF CHRIST.

SEVENTEENTH SERMON.

ON THE GRAVE OF CHRIST AS A PROOF OF HIS DIVINITY.

Subject.

The grave of Christ proved to the world at the time His Godhead.—*Preached on Easter Sunday.*

Text.

Veniunt ad monumentum.—Mark xvi. 2.
“They come to the sepulchre.”

Introduction.

St. Thomas of Aquin asks the question whether it was becoming and suitable to the person of Christ for His body to be placed in the tomb like other dead bodies; and he says, it seems as if it was altogether unbecoming, because the dead in the grave are, as it were, in a prison in close confinement; and the Prophet David foretold of Christ that He would be “free among the dead;”¹ therefore it was not becoming for Him to be imprisoned in a tomb. Besides it is not right for God, who dwells in the highest heavens, to be buried under the earth. Nevertheless, answers the Angelic Doctor, it was suitable for Christ to be buried, first to confirm the truth of that article of faith that He rose again; for no one is buried unless his death is certain. Secondly, that by His resurrection from the dead our hope might be strengthened of one day rising with Christ out of our graves, according to the words of the Gospel of St. John: “The hour cometh wherein all that are in the graves shall hear the voice of the Son of God.”² The third reason is assigned by St. Chrysostom: it was not unbecoming for Christ to be buried, for under the circumstances His burial made the glory of His Godhead more manifest. With these words I agree, my dear brethren, and I now say to the honor of our risen Lord:

¹ *Inter mortuos liber.*—Ps. lxxxvii. 6.

² *Venit hora in qua omnes qui in monumentis sunt, audient vocem Filii Dei.*—John v. 28.

Plan of Discourse.

The grave of Jesus Christ showed to the world at the time the glory of His divinity. Such is the whole subject of this panegyric.

The moral lesson to be learned from it will form the conclusion for the good of our souls, and we expect it from Thee, O Lord, through Thy glorious resurrection, and through the intercession of Thy Mother Mary and of our holy guardian angels.

When a great honor is voluntarily, freely, and without any ulterior design, shown to one deceased, it is a sure sign that men acknowledge in him something extraordinarily virtuous and meritorious. The marks of honor shown to the living are hardly ever directed purely to the person who receives them, no matter how worthy he may be, but are nearly always accompanied by some motive of flattery, self-interest, or human respect. People often make the deepest reverences, hat in hand, and on bended knee, to those whom they secretly despise and abhor. These outward signs of honor are generally nothing but mere ceremonies and empty show, by which the vain world wishes to deceive itself and to be deceived, either to curry favor with some great man, or to obtain some privilege, or to avoid being looked on as impolite. On the other hand, in the case of a dead body, from which one has nothing to fear or to hope for, these false and empty compliments have no place; and if they are offered with the intention of pleasing the living friends of the deceased, they are then not directed properly to the deceased himself; hence when special honor is paid to one who is dead, it is a sure sign of his worth and merit.

Great honor exhibited to the dead shows his virtue and worth.

Especially when the person was unknown or despised during his lifetime. Unknown or despised, I say; for that children should spend much money in costly funerals for their parents, or friends for their nearest relations, or that on the death of the prince or sovereign all the bells in the country should be tolled, the churches hung with mourning, and splendid monuments erected everywhere: all that is required by the love that children owe their parents, and by the respect due from subjects to their lawful rulers. But these honors are no proof that the dead body deserves honor, for the soul may be perhaps accursed by God and burning in the fire of hell at the very moment when so much respect is shown to the lifeless corpse on earth. But if such mag-

Especially if he was unknown and despised in life.

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nificent obsequies were given to some poor peasant's servant found dead behind the plough in the field, or to a poor beggar who died in a stable, or to a wretched, unhappy wight cut down from the gallows: what great surprise would be occasioned? What is the meaning of this? every one would cry out; and all would have to confess that there is something more than common in the whole matter; that the man must have been a very great saint, since Divine Providence has all at once inspired men with such reverence and respect for his memory.

As we learn
from his-
tory.

In former times when kings and emperors came and prostrated themselves before the graves of Peter and Paul, and humbly venerated their relics, the world learned what great apostles were those two poor, persecuted, banished, scourged, and despised men, who were publicly executed. And when the bells tolled of themselves at the death of Alexius, and the bishop and clergy came with cross and banner to bring away his dead body, then at last came to light the fact that the poor beggar who had lived unknown for so many years under the staircase of his father's house was indeed a great friend of God. And when the Emperor Theodosius the Younger sent the Patriarch Proclus, accompanied by the highest dignitaries of the clergy, from Constantinople to Armenia with a humble petition for the body of John Chrysostom, who had been banished thither and had died there through sheer trouble and sorrow, which body was brought with great pomp to Constantinople, and amidst the joyous acclamations of the people placed on the episcopal throne as if still in life, then did God show to the world how unjustly His innocent servant had been banished, and how highly He wished his sanctity to be esteemed. For, as Claudius Guillaudius says: "The honor freely offered to the dead is a sure sign of worth."¹

Christ was
always
treated
with con-
tempt dur-
ing life.

Now to our subject, my dear brethren. Let us consider briefly in what state Our Lord was during His life on earth. He was the Son of the eternal God, the Lord and Ruler of the world, before as well as after He came into it; but who looked on Him as such except His virginal Mother and the few whom He especially enlightened to acknowledge His Godhead? In the eyes and judgment of the rest of the world He passed as the Son of a poor carpenter, who barely managed to eke out an existence by his work and the alms bestowed on him. In the three last years of His life, during His public mission, He wandered about in the com-

¹ Honor qui ultro mortuis offertur, certissimum est virtutis testimonium.

pany of poor fishermen, surrounded by the common people, hated by the scribes and high-priests, despised everywhere as a seducer, traitor, drunkard, sorcerer; until at last He fell into their hands, was laden with ropes and chains like a malefactor and murderer, dragged before the tribunals, buffeted, scourged with rods, ropes, whips, publicly accused by witnesses, condemned by the judge's sentence to the disgraceful death of the cross, and led outside the city to be executed. My God! what a wonderful thing that there was no one to say the least word before His judges in defence of His innocence! Among the crowd who were witnesses of the event, there must have been many who had been freed by Him from the evil spirit, and healed of diseases, or whose children and friends had had such miracles worked by Him in their favor; and many too who had come from all parts to hear Him preach; was there not one among them all who had the courage to open his mouth, and refute the calumnies and false testimonies uttered against Our Lord? No; not one took His part, even among His own most intimate friends and disciples. Peter, who had on a former occasion given such hearty testimony of Him, saying: "Thou art Christ, the Son of the living God;"¹ who had so bravely boasted that he was ready to go to death with Him; even Peter refused to acknowledge that he knew Christ when He was standing before the judge like a poor criminal; all the other disciples were scandalized in Him, and took to flight; those who had believed in Him on account of His miracles now believed no longer; they imagined they had been deceived by Him, and they cried out: Crucify! crucify Him! while He, the Accused, remains silent, saying not a word to justify Himself, as if He wished to appear deserving of death. Thus abandoned by all, He was led to execution, nailed to the gibbet, and there left to die. See to what a miserable condition He is reduced! What sign of divinity do you behold in Him?

But wait a little! Let Him only breathe His last and the scene will quickly change. His burial alone will show to the world what a great Lord and almighty God He is. Hardly had my breath left Him when, as the Scripture says, there came amongst the people who were all striking their breasts "Joseph of Arimathea, a noble counsellor."² "And Nicodemus also came;"³ whom St. John elsewhere describes as "A ruler of the

The moment He died the noblest of the land came forward to honor His burial.

¹ Tu es Christus Filius Dei vivi.—Matt. xvi. 16.

² Venit Joseph ab Arimathea, nobilis decurio.—Mark xv. 43.

³ Venit autem et Nicodemus.—John xix. 39.

Jews.”¹ Mark that these were not lowly, poor people, but nearly the richest and noblest of all, who thus took charge of the body of Him who had been executed, in order to give it splendid burial. And how did they manage the matter? Perhaps secretly and by night, that no one should see them, as the same Nicodemus had formerly come to see Jesus in the dark night through fear of the Jews? No, says St. Mark of Joseph: He “went in boldly to Pilate, and begged the body of Jesus.”² And when he had obtained from Pilate the necessary permission, “buying fine linen and taking Him down, wrapped Him up in the fine linen.”³ “And Nicodemus also came bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about an hundred pound weight.”⁴ “They took therefore the body of Jesus, and bound it in linen cloths with the spices, as the manner of the Jews is to bury,”⁵ and to bury the noblest and greatest. They then laid Him in a new sepulchre hewn out of a rock in a garden, “wherein no man yet had been laid.”⁶ So far the Gospels of St. Mark and St. John.

Although during His life they did not dare to be seen with Him.

How did that happen? asks Cajetan with just astonishment. Who moved Joseph to make such a daring request of Pilate in such a courageous manner, and to demand for burial the body of One who in the opinion of the world was only a common malefactor? Who inspired Nicodemus with the bravery necessary to take such a principal part in the matter, publicly to provide spices, and show such great honor to the dead body? If they both did that out of love for the Deceased, why did they not show Him the same affection during His lifetime? For we are apt to honor one whom we know to be great and mighty much more during life than after death. Why had they not the courage to declare themselves friends and disciples of Jesus while He was still alive? Joseph was a noble counsellor, Nicodemus a ruler of the Jews; had they not the power of saying a word for Him? Why did they not do so, and boldly defend the innocence of Jesus before the judge and the false witnesses? Why did they not excite the people against the envious Pharisees

¹ Princeps Judæorum.—John iii. 1.

² Audacter introivit ad Pilatum, et petit corpus Jesu.—Mark xv. 43.

³ Mercatus sindonem, et deponens eum, involvit sindone.—Ibid. 46.

⁴ Venit autem et Nicodemus, ferens mixturam myrrhæ et aloes, quasi libras centum.—John xix. 39.

⁵ Acceperunt ergo corpus Jesu, et ligaverunt illud linteis cum aromatibus, sicut mos est Judæis sepelire.—Ibid. 40.

⁶ In quo nondum quisquam positus erat.—Ibid. 41.

and scribes, who wished to make away with Jesus through sheer hatred. And see, even these noble men now come forward for the first time, acknowledge the innocence of Christ, and publicly by their actions declare themselves as His friends, after He had been actually condemned and put to a painful and shameful death. Then indeed they had reason to be ashamed of Him, and to doubt whether He was really the Son of God.

Oh, answers Cajetan, even this is an evident proof of the divinity concealed in Him who seemed but a poor, miserable mortal; for a divine power alone is able to change and move the minds of men in such circumstances. Jesus chose to die of His own free will, as One deserving of death, for the sins of the world. If during His life, He had wished, as He easily might have done, to move men to speak for Him and to defend Him, then people might have said that He died against His will, since He sought, as far as He could, to free Himself by the help of His friends. No! "He was offered because it was His own will."¹ But this sudden change after His death, this honorable sepulture given Him was to declare and publish to all the world that He is the Lord of hearts, the Saviour of the world, and the true God.

It is a clear proof of the Godhead of Christ, which they acknowledged after His death.

Again, what is still more to be wondered at: what answer did Pilate make to the unusual request of Joseph? If I or another went nowadays to the civil judges, and asked their permission to cut down the body of a malefactor from the gallows, or to take it off of the wheel, in order to give it a public funeral, what answer should I expect? There is no doubt I should be refused, even if the unfortunate wight begged for it himself a thousand times before his death, as I know by frequent experience; to no purpose, I imagine, should such a request be put forward; there would be no hope of its being granted. And so I should, in case any such application were made to me, tell the unhappy man to be satisfied, that I would do my best to see him buried decently; and I should keep my promise honorably, although I should have little hope of getting permission to give him a public funeral. And yet, who would credit it? hardly was the request made of Pilate, when he granted it exactly as Joseph wished, and commanded them to give him over the body of Christ, that he might commit it to the earth as he pleased: "Then Pilate

It appeared still more clearly from the fact that Pilate and the Jews allowed His burial.

¹ Oblatus est quia ipse voluit. -Is. liii, 7.

commanded that the body should be delivered.”¹ But, we might think, the festival of Easter was at hand, when the Jews did not wish the body to hang on the cross, so that they were compelled to take it down? True; but why did not Pilate say: If you wish to bury Him, let it be done in a manner suitable to a criminal; bury Him under the gibbet on the place of execution? But no! “Pilate commanded that the body should be delivered,” and that they might bury it as honorably as they pleased. And what had the envious Jews, the high-priests and scribes to say to that? Did they allow it? They wished to obliterate the memory of the deceiver, the traitor, so they called Our Lord, from the minds of all men, so that His name should be heard no more. How then could they permit One whom they caused to be put to such a shameful death, to have such an honorable funeral? Mark here again, my dear brethren, the power of the divinity of Christ, who showed Himself herein as the omnipotent Lord of hearts. Publicly, in presence of all the Jews the whole affair took place, without one of them having power to prevent it.

He was buried in a new grave hewn out of a rock.

“There therefore because of the Parasceve of the Jews, they laid Jesus, because the sepulchre was nigh at hand.”² And that the designs of Divine Providence might be still more manifest, it was a perfectly new grave: “Now there was in the place where He was crucified, a garden; and in the garden a new sepulchre, wherein no man yet had been laid.”³ Why so? That, answers St. Jerome, all chance of calumny and falsehood regarding the matter might be taken away from the envious Jews; for if there had been several bodies buried in the same place, they might have said that it was some one else who rose from the dead. Moreover the grave was hewn out of the hard rock: “Which was hewed out of a rock.”⁴ Why was it not dug in the earth, or at least built up in stone? Again a proof of the divinity of Jesus Christ, and of the dispositions of His providence with regard to the glory of His burial, and of the infallible certainty of His resurrection, as Cajetan answers. For if He had been buried in the earth in a common coffin, or placed in a tomb built up with stone, the Jews would have had more reason for asserting that the disciples took Him out of the earth, or from the tomb, and

¹ Tunc Pilatus jussit reddi corpus.—Matt. xxvii. 58.

² Ibi ergo propter parasceven Judæorum, quia juxta erat monumentum, posuerunt Jesum.—John xix. 42.

³ Erat autem in loco, ubi crucifixus est, hortus; et in horto monumentum novum, in quod nondum quisquam positus erat.—Ibid. 41.

⁴ Erat excisum de petra —Mark xv. 46.

so they would have called into doubt the truth of the resurrection. But since the sepulchre of Our Lord was cut in the hard rock, covered with a huge stone, and sealed with the seal of the synagogue, the falsehood of such a calumny at once appears, while the glory of the dead Saviour, who rose again to life by His own divine power, is made all the more manifest and evident.

Nay, contrary to their intention, the Jews themselves contributed to add to the pomp and splendor of the burial of Christ. For they placed a guard of soldiers round the sepulchre, as we see done nowadays before the houses and at the funerals of princes and kings. In spite of these soldiers, Mary Magdalene and other pious women come fearlessly with salves and ointments; the disciples who had before abandoned Jesus in their fear, now come to visit His grave and to show Him honor, without one of the Jews trying to prevent them, or saying a word against what they did. See, exclaims St. John Chrysostom in his treatise against the heathens, in which he proves Christ to be true God, see how before His death there was nothing for Him but sadness, pain, vilification, persecution, shame, disgrace, destruction, even to the death of the cross; but immediately after His death the minds of men change, and you behold how the chief men of the Jews vie with each other in honoring Him, how glorious and splendid is His burial, how magnificent the pomp of His resurrection! "That you may know that it was not a mere man who was crucified:"¹ that all the world might clearly see that He who was there crucified was not a mere mortal man, but the true God. This was all prophesied by Isaias: "His sepulchre shall be glorious."² The Septuagint has it: "His rest shall be His honor."³ Christ Jesus, true God and Man! we congratulate Thee, and rejoice with all our hearts that after Thy death the world knows Thee as such! We rejoice that from that time forward every knee must bend before Thee in heaven, on earth, and under the earth; that Thy holy name must be everywhere spoken with the utmost reverence; that in all parts the cry must resound: "Praised be Jesus Christ!"

My dear Christians, what conclusion are we to draw from all this, that we may not be without some profit for our souls? As we have heard, and as all the Gospels testify, Jesus Christ was during His life poor, lowly in the eyes of men, suffering and de-

Nay, even against their will the Jews helped to render His sepulchre glorious.

Moral for vain worldlings, who will lose all their glory after death.

¹ Ut noscas, non purum hominem crucifixum.—S. Chrys. in Tract. contra Gentiles.

² Er̄t sepulchrum ejus gloriosum.—Is. xi. 10.

³ Er̄it requies ejus honor.

spised; but after His death He was honored, glorious, and triumphant. How do we wish to have things with ourselves? Quite the contrary; as long as we are on this earth, we wish to appear great before men, to be loved and honored. Daily profits, increase of wealth, adding to our possessions, augmenting our yearly income, such is the chief happiness to the securing of which we direct our greatest care and diligence, and the sole object of it is to be able better to look after this mortal body, to secure its repose, comfort, pleasure, well-being by providing it with good food and drink, and the means and opportunity of indulging in sleep and all desired pleasures of the senses. But we think little of what is to follow hereafter. What will become of us in a few short years, perhaps months, or even days and hours, when our lives shall come to an end? "Only the grave remaineth for me." We must all acknowledge with Job: I shall then have nothing but a coffin a few feet broad, in which I shall be buried in the earth; and in a short time, what shall be found in that coffin? Foul carrion, an intolerable stench, worms, vermin, dust, and ashes. See what becomes of all the honor and dignity, wealth and property, beauty and stateliness, pleasures and delights of the world! "Here lies so-and-so;" such is the inscription to be read on the tombstones and on the mausoleums of even the most illustrious princes and potentates; "here lies so-and-so." And if the epitaph spoke more truly, it would read: here decays the body; here are rotting away the bones. That great monarch who was almost adored during his life, lies here and is decaying away. His attendants and satellites are now the crawling worms. That celebrated general, who during life was the terror of his enemies, lies here and is rotting away, given over as a prey to the worms; not even a child fears him now, nor has any dread of him, except that excited by the apprehension of seeing his ghost. That rich man who labored so hard during life and lived so economically that he might put together a few thousand ducats, lies here and is decaying away; others have divided among themselves his wealth; a foul hole in the ground is all that he has left as his share. That woman, that maiden who during life was so tender in the treatment of her body, so anxious to adorn it with splendid attire, so fond of attracting attention to her beauty, so that she was wondered at and adored as a kind of idol; she too lies here as foul carrion! Her bed is the moth, her covering the worm,

¹ Solum mihi super est sepulchrum.—Job xvii. 1.

as God says by the Prophet Isaias: "Under thee shall the moth be strewed, and worms shall be thy covering." My dear brethren, so passes away the glory of the world!

And blind mortals that we are! we seek it, we desire it, we long for it so ardently! We become so enamored of some mortal beauty that will soon be eaten by the worms, that often during this life we are so foolish as for the sake of it to set aside the God of infinite beauty and the eternal joys He has prepared for us after this life! The wretched point of honor, that vanishes with the sound of our funeral knell, is often of such importance to us in this life, that for it we sacrifice the crown of eternal glory. To preserve in this life the transitory riches, of which we know death will strip us completely in any case, we often sell the precious treasures of heaven! The wanton flesh, whose desires so often lead us into sin, we treat most delicately in this life, and do not remember how it will afterwards rot away in the grave. Yet its rotting away is of little importance, for such is the common lot of rich and poor, high and lowly, pious and wicked. What is most to be deplored is that we take such little care as to what the lot of our bodies shall be on the day of the general resurrection, when the trumpet shall resound in all the graves and awaken the dead lying therein to summon them before the throne of the Judge; namely, as to whether our bodies shall then, to our undying confusion, be banished away among the foul goats, or be invited to enter into eternal glory among the blessed sheep of Christ.

And yet pursue the goods of this world, caring little how their bodies shall fare in the resurrection.

Let this last hope comfort and console you, pious Christians, when perhaps trouble and adversity, or the mortifications voluntarily undertaken for the sake of God and heaven make your lives rather hard now and then. Think: "Ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and so to enter into His glory?" If the innocent Son of God had to make the way to glory through the cross, much more should I, a sinner, do so. Therefore let my body fare in this life as shall seem good to the providence of God, if only afterwards it shall be well with me. Let my body now suffer with Christ in poverty, contempt, hunger and sorrow, labor and toil, pains and sickness, crosses and trials, if only hereafter I can rejoice in eternal glory, in that honor and happiness, in that superabundance of joys in which shall be fulfilled the

Consolation for the pious under trials.

¹ *Subter te sternetur tineæ, et operimentum tuum erunt vermes.—Is. xiv. 11.*

² *Nonne hæc oportuit pati Christum, et ita intrare in gloriam suam?—Luke xxiv. 26.*

words of St. Paul: "Who will reform the body of our lowness, made like to the body of His glory."¹ Let therefore this body of mine rot in the grave and be consumed by worms. Nay, it is of little import whether it decays in the grave or on a dung-hill; and I have no objection that after my death it should be hung on a gallows (would to God that the honor were mine, that I were found worthy in the sight of God to be hung thereon living for His honor and glory!); let my body be dealt with as may be, provided only my soul ascends into heaven with the elect. This alone, as long as I shall be on earth, shall be my only care, and for that end I shall serve God diligently. Now I will mortify my flesh, its senses and desires, that hereafter I may rejoice all the more in glory. Thus I can and will comfort myself with the infallibly sure hope that encouraged Job in his sufferings: "I know that my Redeemer liveth, and in the last day I shall rise out of the earth; and I shall be clothed again with my skin, and in my flesh I shall see my God."² No matter where and how my flesh has decayed in the grave, in it I shall behold my God in heaven, and there sing without end the joyous alleluias with the angels and the elect. Amen.

EIGHTEENTH SERMON.

ON THE GLORY OF THE GRAVE OF CHRIST EVEN AT THE PRESENT TIME.

Subject.

The grave of Christ is at the present day an irrefragable proof to all the world of the divinity of Christ.—*Preached on Easter Sunday.*

Text.

Veniunt ad monumentum.—Mark xvi. 2.

"They come to the sepulchre."

Introduction.

Although during His life on earth Our Saviour was before the world the most humble, lowly, and despised of all the children of men, who taught us by word and example to contemn the pomp

¹ Qui reformabit corpus humilitatis nostræ, configuratum corpori claritatis sue.—Philipp. iii. 21.

² Scio quod Redemptor meus vivit, et in novissimo die de terra surrecturus sum; et rursum circumdabor pelle mea, et in carne mea videbo Deum meum.—Job xix. 25, 26.

and vanity of the world, and chose for Himself dishonor, shame, and disgrace, even to the ignominious death of the cross; yet before His death He was extremely solicitous for the honor and glory of His future burial. The supper in Bethania as described by St. Matthew, is a proof of this. While Jesus was sitting at table with His disciples, Magdalene entered, "having an alabaster-box of precious ointment, and poured it on His head as He was at table."¹ The disciples began to murmur at what they thought a wasteful, superfluous, unnecessary expenditure, saying that it would have been better to give the money to the poor. Christ, who afterwards made no answer to the blasphemies and revilings levelled at Him, could not conceal His indignation on this occasion. What! He exclaimed; why do you murmur? "Why do you trouble this woman?" You must know "she hath wrought a good work upon Me. For she in pouring this ointment upon My body hath done it for My burial."² She has done it in order to anticipate My burial, and to show Me now the honor that will be afterwards exhibited to My body in the grave. "She hath wrought a good work upon Me." St. Basil is of the opinion that these words were addressed chiefly to Judas, who was the author of the murmurs and complaints. Ah, Judas! so he represents Our Lord as speaking: do not grudge Me an honorable burial.³ You are about to take away My life by your treason: do so if you wish; I willingly give My life; but do not interfere with the honor due to My grave. And, O Lord, is the honor of Thy grave then of more importance to Thee than Thy life? Truly, would be Our Lord's answer: so pleasing and agreeable to Me is the service now rendered Me, that I will make the memory of it undying and imperishable throughout the whole world: "Amen I say to you, wheresoever this gospel shall be preached in the whole world, that also which she hath done shall be told for a memory of her."⁴ That, my dear brethren, is the reason why we read in to-day's gospel that the holy women were so diligent in buying spices wherewith to anoint the dead body of Christ in the grave. And indeed the prophecy was fulfilled: "His sepul-

¹ *Habens alabastrum unguenti pretiosi, et effudit super caput ipsius recumbentis.*—Matt. xxvi. 7.

² *Quid molesti estis huic mulieri? Opus bonum operata est in me. Mittens enim hæc unguentum hoc in corpus meum, ad sepeliendum me fecit.*—Ibid. 10, 12.

³ *Ne mihi sepulchrales ritus invidias.*

⁴ *Amen dico vobis, ubicumque prædicatum fuerit hoc evangelium in toto mundo, dicetur et quod hæc fecit in memoriam ejus.*—Matt. xxvi. 13.

chre shall be glorious.”¹ On this day last year I proved that the grave of Christ was immediately after His death an undoubted proof of the divinity of Jesus Christ to the whole world at the time; now I add:

Plan of Discourse.

The grave of Christ is also in our own times to the whole of the present world an undoubted proof of the divinity of Jesus Christ. Such is the whole subject of this panegyric, to the endless honor and glory of Our Saviour on this day of special honor to Him.

Let us so live now that when our bodies are lying in the grave, our souls may be in glory with God; such shall be the conclusion, which we beg of Thee to effect in us all by Thy grace, O glorious Saviour, through the intercession of Mary and of the holy angels.

Pious men have always wished to be buried among the faithful.

But what do I say? That the grave of Christ announces even now to the world the honor and glory of His Godhead? How can that be? For where, in what part of the world, is that grave to be seen? In Jerusalem under the yoke of the barbarians, the Turks, the sworn enemies of the divinity of Jesus Christ and of all those who call themselves Christians. That seems rather to bring dishonor and shame to Our Lord than to redound to His praise and glory. Where is the Christian who would select a Jewish cemetery as the place of his burial? And if He was forced to do so, would he think it an honor and glory in the sight of the world? Have not men, especially pious men, in the Old as well as in the New Law, always been very careful about their burial, not wishing to be interred among the wicked in unconsecrated ground, but with the friends of God in holy earth?

How careful the patriarch Abraham was in this respect.

When the patriarch Abraham, that great and holy father of the faithful, dwelt in the land of Canaan, his wife Sara died. After having long mourned her death, he went to the rulers of the land, and asked them to sell him a certain portion of ground where he could build a monument to his deceased wife. What? was the answer: “Thou art a prince of God among us: bury thy dead in our principal sepulchres;” take the best and most beautiful of all: “and no man shall have power to hinder thee from burying thy dead in his sepulchre.”² But the holy man

¹ *Erit sepulchrum ejus gloriosum.*—Is. xl. 10.

² *Princeps Dei es apud nos: in electis sepulchris nostris sepeli mortuum tuum, nullusque te prohibere poterit quin in monumento ejus sepelias mortuum tuum.*—Gen. xxiii. 6.

was not satisfied with this ; he rose up, says the Scripture, and bought for four hundred sicles of silver a separate field, in which he buried Sara. Why so? Why did he not accept one of the splendid graves offered him? He did not wish, says De Lyra, to bury his wife amongst infidels.¹ The inhabitants of Canaan were infidels, and the greater number of them idolaters; Sara was a holy woman, and therefore he would not allow her to be buried among the unbelievers.

Equal care about his burial was shown by the patriarch in Egypt. On his death-bed he sent for his son Joseph to make a last request of him. And what was it? Dearest son, said he, "if I have found favor in thy sight, put thy hand under my thigh; and thou shalt show me this kindness and truth, not to bury me in Egypt; but I will sleep with my fathers, and thou shalt take me away out of this land, and bury me in the burying-place of my ancestors." "I will do what thou hast commanded," was Joseph's answer. "Swear then to me," said Jacob, that I may be sure. And Joseph had to swear to do it. "And as he was swearing, Israel adored God, turning to the bed's head."² See how Jacob could not bear the idea of being buried among idolatrous people in Egypt. And afterwards Joseph himself acted in the same manner. When he was about to die, he said to his brothers that after many years they would be led by God into the promised land: "And he made them swear to him, saying: God will visit you: carry my bones with you out of this place."³ So hateful to these holy people was the thought of finding their last resting-place among heathens and idolatrous nations, although they had spent their lives among them.

And what are the feelings of us Catholics nowadays on the matter? Do we not do all in our power to have our graves in a church, or at all events in a consecrated cemetery amongst Catholic Christians? In my experience the worst trial of all to a criminal who is about to be executed, is that his body will not be buried in consecrated ground. It is reckoned as the greatest disgrace to have people say of one: he is buried among the criminals and thieves.

Jacob and Joseph.

Catholics too are of the same mind in this matter.

¹ Nolebat eam sepelire cum infidelibus.

² Si inveni gratiam in conspectu tuo, pone manum tuam sub femore meo, et facies mihi misericordiam et veritatem, ut non sepelias me in Ægypto. Sed dormiam cum patribus meis, et auferas me de terra hac, condasque in sepulchro majorum meorum. Ego faciam quod jussisti. Jura ergo, inquit, mihi. Quo jurante, adoravit Israel Deum, conversus ad lectuli caput.—Gen. xlvii. 29-31.

³ Cuique adjurasset eos atque dixisset: Deus visitabit vos: asportate ossa mea vobiscum de hoc loco.—Ibid. l. 24.

Christ could easily free His grave from the hands of the Turks, and bring it to a holy place among Christians: yet He does it not.

Now, my dear brethren, I ask how is it possible that Jesus, the Holy of holies, can tolerate having His tomb in a heathen land, amongst those wicked people and under the dominion of the Turk? Has He not in a most wonderful manner caused His holy coat, His cross, the nails, the lance, the crown of thorns, and almost all the other instruments of His bitter passion to be brought to Christian lands? Even the cottage of Nazareth in which He was brought up was by a special miracle brought by the hands of angels to Loreto in Italy, that this precious relic might not remain in the power of the enemies of the Christians. Could not He, in whose name even ordinary men can transpose mountains from one place to another, could not He easily bring His sacred grave away from the land of the barbarous Mahometans and place it amongst His faithful Christians? Or, if He absolutely wished to have it in that place, He is the Lord and Master of all the kings and potentates of the world, and He might easily have enabled them to free Jerusalem from the yoke of the Turks, and place it again under the rule of the Christians.

Nor have Christian princes been able to do that even by force of arms.

Ah, Christian princes, where are ye? Why do you not muster all your forces against the hereditary enemy of your name, and save that great treasure, the sacred grave of Our Saviour, from the hands of the Turks? But there is no use in grieving about the matter! Already many emperors and kings have done their best to take the city of Jerusalem and free the grave of Our Lord; but to no purpose hitherto; nearly always has the providence of God restrained the swords of the Christian soldiers even in the very moment of victory. So that the sacred treasure remains among the godless people, under the tyranny and slavery of the Turks, the enemies of the Christians.

The divinity of Christ appears from the fact that His grave exists among the Turks.

But, I again ask, what honor is that for Christ Our Lord? Truly, my dear brethren, it is an honor to Him! For the glory of His Godhead appears from the fact that the potentates of the world have so often vied with each other and shed their blood in streams to have the great happiness of possessing the sepulchre of a Man who was publicly put to death on a gibbet as a criminal. Who ever heard of such efforts being made to secure possession of the tomb of even the greatest king, emperor, or monarch of earth? And the very fact that the tomb of Christ is in the hands of the infidel, and not among Christians, contributes to its glory. Truly, remarks Cajetan with justice, "it continues to exist gloriously even under the power of the infidel, amongst so

many changes and calamities, as a testimony to the divinity of Christ.”¹

How many changes has not the world witnessed during the last seventeen hundred years? During that time the ancient city of Rome was laid waste and a new city built; the same happened to many other cities. In almost every part of the world the most magnificent castles and palaces, the most splendid temples and churches have been levelled to the ground, or burnt and destroyed by the ravages of war, as we have had sad experience of here in Treves. And this occurred in Europe amongst Catholic Christians. And what has happened in the country of the Jews, now under the rule of the Turks? Hardly a town can be found which has retained its ancient site; the whole country is turned upside down. How often was not the city of Jerusalem, which contains the sacred tomb of Our Lord, laid waste? What has become of the temple of Solomon, that wonder of the world that we might well think could be spared from destruction? If we had not a description of it in Holy Writ and elsewhere, we should not even know that such a building ever existed. The prophecy of Christ that He uttered with tears in His eyes over Jerusalem is fulfilled: “They shall not leave in thee a stone upon a stone.”² The grave of Christ alone remains intact and uninjured where it was first, in spite of the lapse of time and amid so many changes, wars, and devastations.

Since it remains intact amid so many changes.

If it had remained thus uninjured in a Christian land, there would certainly not be such great reason for admiration; for if we are careful to preserve the relics of the saints, how much more care would we not devote to the preservation of such a precious monument as the grave of Our Redeemer? The land of Treves can point to the extraordinary solicitude and diligence with which the holy coat of Christ has been preserved amongst us, so as not to let it fall into the hands even of other Christians. In war time, or even when there is the least fear of a war, this treasure is kept in a strong fortress; and hence it is that the sacred relic has never been publicly shown for so many years. What care then, I say, would not Christians take to protect the grave of Christ from attack, if it were in their hands? But that it should remain in its pristine glory up to the present time amongst heathens and Jews (as was the case at first) who buried

And among the enemies of Christ.

¹ Vere gloriosum perseverat, etiam sub potestate infidelium, inter tot devastaciones et mutaciones, in testimonium divinitatis Jesu.—Caj. in c. 27 Matt.

² Non relinquent in te lapidem super lapidem.—Luke xix. 44.

the cross in the earth, that it might not be discovered, and erected in its place an infamous heathen statue; who labored so strenuously to blot out every vestige of the Christian name; that it should remain in spite, and that too in the midst of the Turks, who are the sworn enemies of Christians, and possess as it were the grave of Christ against their will, where it has no protector but itself; that it should so remain in spite of wars and devastations: that is indeed one of the greatest miracles, a most incomprehensible marvel, and an evident proof of the divinity of Christ.

And although they have often tried to destroy it.

If, my dear brethren, we were masters of the land of the Turks, would we not immediately destroy the grave of their false prophet Mahomet, or at least prevent any one from showing any honor to it? In the days of the early Christians the most beautiful and costly temples of the false gods were razed to the ground, and some of them were converted into churches of the true God. How is it then that the enemies of Christ do not act in the same way with His grave, which is in their own territory? And indeed many Turkish sovereigns tried to destroy it, as we know from the testimony of Osorius and others cited by Cornelius à Lapide. Several times did the Sultan write to the Pope, threatening that if the king of Portugal did not desist from sending his ships into India, he would destroy the grave of Christ; but he never went beyond a threat. The ships continued to go to India, and the grave of Christ exists to this day in spite of all its enemies, and although it is in their power.

Hence it is held in the greatest honor all over the world.

And how is it treated there? It is held in more glory and honor than the Turks themselves show the grave of their prophet; more than we Catholics show the most illustrious relics of the saints; nay, perhaps more than we could show the same grave if we had it in our midst. To say nothing of the magnificent temple that encloses it, or of the religious who day and night pray and sing the praises of God in the presence and with the permission of the enemies of Christ, "glorious is His grave," says De Lyra, "for even the noblest of the faithful come from all parts of the world to honor it."¹ And truly what a vast number of people, of nobles and princes from the most remote lands have up to the present time ventured on the journey to Jerusalem to honor the tomb of their Saviour, and to remain there in spite of the difficulties of the road, and the imminent risk of

¹ *Gloriosum sepulchrum, quia fideles per orbem existentes, etiam magni et nobiles, vadunt ad ipsum venerandum.*

being made slaves of by the Turks, a fate far worse than death? How many were there not who left their all, house and home, wife and children, money and wealth, and risked their lives to have the happiness of seeing the grave of the Crucified? How much gold and silver is not sent from the Christian world to adorn the grave and to support the servants of God who help to keep up its splendor? With reason doēs St. Bernard sigh forth: O dearest Saviour, every place in which Thou didst perform the work of our salvation is holy, glorious, and worthy of all honor; but Thy grave in truth surpasses all in glory. Oh, how I long to kiss the sacred ground marked by Thy footsteps! What a holy desire possesses me to behold the stable at Bethlehem, in which Thou wast born a little Child; the house of Nazareth in which Thou wast brought up as a youth; the city of Jerusalem in which Thou didst suffer and wast crucified! My heart is drawn to the Garden of Gethsemani in which Thou didst sweat blood; to Mount Olivet at the foot of which Thou didst pray so often; to Mount Thabor on which Thou wast transfigured; to Calvary on which Thou didst die; but amidst all these holy and desirable places, the sepulchre in which Thy dead body rested, somehow or other holds the chief rank.¹

From this, my dear brethren, I now draw the following conclusion: If we had no other proof of the divinity of Christ, of that Man who died for us on the cross, then the mere fact of His grave being held in such honor under such circumstances is argument enough to show that we Christians must adore Christ as the true God. For if He were not God, then must He be one of the greatest impostors (allow me, O great Son of God, to say the word to Thy greater honor and glory!); for during His life He publicly said that He was God, the Son of God, and confirmed His words by miracles; now no man can be a worse impostor than he who falsely pretends to be God, and arrogates to himself the divine majesty which does not belong to him. And if Christ was so wicked, the infinitely wise providence of God could not permit His grave to be publicly honored before the world for so many centuries under such miraculous circumstances, to be looked upon as the last resting place of God, to be held in such reverence by so many millions of Christians; nor could He allow so many millions to be deceived so grossly and so constantly.

If Christ were not true God, Providence would not allow His grave to be so honored.

¹ Inter sancta et desiderabilia loca sepulchrum tenet quodammodo principatum.—S. Bern. Germ. ad milit. templi.

The true God, I say, could not allow that, for, as theologians teach, He cannot work a miracle in favor of a falsehood.

For God often destroyed the graves of the wicked.

Do we not read in Holy Writ that the Lord very often prevented the wicked, especially the proud, from having honorable burial after death? The Scripture says of the rebellious Absalom, who set himself up as king in Israel against his father David, that he "had reared up for himself in his lifetime a pillar, which is in the king's valley,"¹ that is a tomb or monument. But what happened to him? Divine Providence, says St. John Chrysostom, would not grant him the honor he had prepared for himself; therefore "they took Absalom, and cast him into a great pit in the forest," like carrion thrown among wild beasts, "and they laid an exceeding great heap of stones upon him"² to put him altogether out of sight. The same fate befel Sobna the high-priest in the temple of Jerusalem; inspired by pride and an inordinate conceit of himself, he had constructed for himself a splendid mausoleum on the summit of a mountain; when the Lord said to His Prophet Isaias: "Go, get thee to Sobna who is over the temple, and thou shalt say to him: What dost thou here, or as if thou wert somebody here? for thou hast hewed thee out a sepulchre here, thou hast hewed out a monument carefully in a high place, a dwelling for thyself in a rock. Behold, the Lord will cause thee to be carried away. He will crown thee with a crown of tribulation, He will toss thee like a ball into a large and spacious country: there shalt thou die, and there shall the chariot of thy glory be, the shame of the house of thy Lord."³ Nay, how often has it not happened that the bodies of the wicked, when buried in consecrated ground, have been miraculously thrown out again? Amongst many other examples, Baronius writes of the year 1304, that the body of a certain proud man, who because he was of high nobility wished to be buried near the church of St. Peter, was found the next day thrown out of the grave and lying in a neighboring street. Five times did they try to bury it in the same place, and five times did they again find it thrown out on the street. Almost similar is the incident related by Surius in

¹ Erexerat sibi, cum adhuc viveret, titulum qui est in valle regis.—II. Kings xviii. 18.

² Tulerunt Absalom, et projecerunt eum in saltu in foveam grandem, et comportaverunt super eum acervum lapidum magnum nimis.—Ibid. 17.

³ Vade, ingredi ad Sobnam præpositum templi, et dices ad eum: Quid tu hic, aut quis quis hic? quia excidisti tibi hic sepulchrum, excidisti in excelso memoriale diligenter, in petra tabernaculum tibi. Ecce Dominus asportari te faciet. Coronans coronabit te tribulatione, quasi pilam mittet te in terram latam et spatiosam: ibi morieris, et ibi erit curus gloriæ tuæ, ignominia domus Domini tui.—Is. xxii. 15-18.

the Life of St. Swibert; the friends of a certain wicked man who had died wished to bury him in the cemetery consecrated to this saint, but when they opened the grave the earth fell in again, and after repeated unsuccessful efforts, they were at last obliged to cast the body into a river.

And if God often permits the sinner, whose soul is in hell, to find a grave in holy ground, yet He never allows that grave to be held in honor as that of a saint, nor to be made illustrious by miracles. From which we can draw this indubitable conclusion: the grave of Christ has been held in such honor and reverence for so many hundred years; it has been made illustrious by many miracles; it has been honored and visited under most remarkable circumstances during all those centuries by people from every part of the world; therefore He who was laid in that grave cannot be an impostor, and, since He gave Himself out as the true God, He must be the true God! "The glorious sepulchre of Christ is a proof of His divinity." My dear brethren, may all that has been said hitherto redound to the glory of Our Saviour on this day of His triumph.

So that the grave of Christ is in itself proof enough of His divinity.

And what thoughts should we bring away with us now? Sooner or later, God only knows when, perhaps sooner than we think, the hour shall come when we too shall have to say with Job: "My spirit shall be wasted, my days shall be shortened, and only the grave remaineth for me."¹ The only thing in the whole world that now belongs to me is my grave, whether it be in earth or water, in consecrated or unholy ground. And how shall my grave be? In glory before the world, or in shame and disgrace like the graves of the wicked? "Their memory hath perished with a noise,"² says the Prophet of them; they have vanished with the sound of their funeral knell. But as to the honor and glory of my grave before the world, wherever that grave may be, it is a thought that troubles me little; my chief concern, as long as I live, is that my soul may rejoice with God while my body is in the grave, and that should be your chief thought too, my dear brethren, with regard to your souls.

Exhortation to mind the soul, that it may appear before God in glory.

Therefore I think and conclude with regard to this matter: now must my body, that shall one day rot away in the tomb, now must it be mortified and chastened, that it may learn to submit to reason and do no harm to my soul; now will I at once by sin-

And to leave the grave of sin by true contrition.

¹ Spiritus meus attenuabitur, dies mei breviabuntur, et solum mihi superest sepulchrum.—Job xvii. 1.

² Perit memoria eorum cum sonitu.—Ps. ix. 7.

cere repentance and amendment of life arise with Christ out of the grave of my sins; I will arise out of the grave of pride and vanity which has hitherto led me into so many abuses; I will close that shameful tomb of which God complains by the Psalmist: "Their throat is an open sepulchre,"¹ from which arise so many oaths and curses, so many calumnies and detractions, so many impure conversations. By a candid confession I will open the grave of my conscience in which I have kept concealed through shame for so many years that sin that I have not yet fully declared in confession. By making full restitution I will open that grave in which I have hitherto kept those ill-gotten gains, and I will in future be more generous in helping Christ in the persons of His poor out of my property. I will destroy that foul grave of impurity, that I have practised so long with myself and others. I will destroy that grave of drunkenness, in which I have so often buried my reason and given rise to many sins. I will open the grave full of rottenness of my sloth in the divine service, by which I have squandered the precious time of my life in sleeping late of a morning, in idleness, in gambling, in unnecessary conversations, in all sorts of vanities, thus losing time every day without making any profit for my soul. By true repentance, I say, all this shall be done. For alas! at Easter time, oh, how many Christians make a confession and pretend a repentance that does not serve to the resurrection, but to the death of the soul! For they remain in the same grave of sin and the proximate occasion of sin; and when they come out of the confessional, and have received their Easter Communion, they may well be rebuked in the terms in which Christ spoke of old to the Scribes and Pharisees: "Wo to you Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites: because you are like to whited sepulchres, which outwardly appear to men beautiful, but within are full of dead men's bones, and of all filthiness; so you also outwardly indeed appear to men just, but inwardly you are full of hypocrisy and iniquity."² No, my God, so shall it never again be with my confessions! Candidly will I deal with Thee and with my soul; everything without exception shall now be abandoned once for all that could keep me in the grave of death, in the state of sin.

¹ Sepulchrum patens est guttur eorum.—Ps. v. 11.

² Vae vobis, Scribæ et Pharisei hypocritæ, quia similes estis sepulchris dealbatis, quæ a foris parent hominibus speciosa, intus vero plena sunt ossibus mortuorum et omni spurcitia: sic et vos a foris quidem parentis hominibus justis; intus autem pleni estis hypocritis, et iniquitate.—Matt. xxiii. 27, 28.

I will rise a new man, that my soul, however it may appear to the world at present, which is a thought that troubles me little, may one day in the valley of Josaphat in the general resurrection of the dead, appear in glory, and rejoice with Thee and Thy elect forever in heaven. Amen.

ON THE RESURRECTION OF CHRIST.

NINETEENTH SERMON.

ON THE TRUTH OF THE RESURRECTION OF CHRIST.

Subject.

Jesus is truly risen; there is the foundation of our faith.
—*Preached on Easter Sunday.*

Text.

Surrexit.—Mark xvi. 6.
“He is risen.”

Introduction.

Hitherto Our Saviour, Jesus Christ, has been leading us on the rugged way of penance, self-denial, mortification, the cross, and suffering, with the crown of thorns on His head, the scourge and the cross in His hand. See how everything is changed to-day; He is decked with the crown of glory, and with the banner of victory in His hand He shows us the happy end of that way. “He is risen.” Angels in heaven, men on earth, all the creatures in the world unite in singing the joyous alleluia, and in offering their congratulations. Sorrow is at an end; the joy that now begins shall never end. “According to the multitude of My sorrows in My heart,” the triumphant Jesus now joyfully sings to His eternal Father, “Thy comforts have given joy to My soul.”¹ My dear brethren, the penances and mortifications, the crosses and trials that we now patiently suffer, or voluntarily undertake, seem difficult, bitter, and hard to bear? Does our weak nature murmur and complain on account of them? If so, then lift up your eyes at once to the light of our faith; see what a joyful ending awaits the short-lived sorrow. If we suffer with our Head, we shall also rise in glory with Him. And this consideration is one of the greatest arguments to encourage us to frequent mortification and penance, and to patience under trial. I

¹ Securum multitudinem dolorum meorum in corde meo, consolationes tue lætificaverunt animam meam.—Ps. xciii. 19.

will now explain only the foundation of this, and without further allusion to the cross, confine myself solely to the triumph of the Crucified.

Plan of Discourse.

“He is risen.” Jesus is truly risen; there you have the foundation of our faith, and the whole subject of this sermon. We shall derive spiritual fruit and profit from it if we imprint deeply on our minds this article of faith.

May the Mother of God, Mary, and the holy angels help me to effect this to the glory of the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

To believe that Jesus really died we have only to remember that He was Man, subject like others to the law of life and death. This is not denied by any one. The Jews acknowledge that the Man who was called Jesus was crucified and murdered by their forefathers; the heathens acknowledge it, if they only believe profane history; for the death of that wonderful Man was made known over the whole world. But to believe that the same Man who died on the cross raised Himself from the dead by His own power, and became alive again—this is the article that distinguishes Christians from Jews and heathens; this is the foundation on which the Christian faith principally rests. For if it is true that Christ rose again, then it is also undoubtedly true that He is God; since no one but God can give Himself life back again. If He is God, then the law promulgated by Him is divine, the truths He taught and still causes to be taught are divine, the Church founded by Him is the true, infallible Church, the promises made by Him to the faithful are infallible, and therefore the Christian faith is the only, true faith in which salvation is to be found. On the other hand, if what is related of the resurrection of Christ is false and fabulous, then it is all up with our faith, as St. Paul says: “If Christ be not risen again, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain;”¹ we are all deceived and befooled. Therefore to strengthen and confirm us in the faith this principal dogma must be often and deeply impressed on our minds.

The truth of Our Lord's resurrection as the foundation of our faith, must be deeply impressed on our minds.

And indeed there is no dogma that God has proved more clearly than this of the resurrection of Christ, unless we wilfully shut our eyes to it. I will not now refer to the prophecies which fore-

We must be convinced of this truth, it is so evident.

¹ Si autem Christus non resurrexit, inanis est ergo predicatio nostra, inanis est et fides vestra.—I. Cor. xv. 14.

told the resurrection long before; and all the prophecies regarding the death of Our Lord were fulfilled to the letter in all their circumstances; nor to the testimony of so many hundred people to whom Jesus appeared in His living body several times during the forty days after the resurrection, and with whom He ate and drank and spoke; nor to the testimony of the angels who pointed to the empty tomb as a proof of the resurrection. I will bring forward only three arguments to support the conclusion, and no one of sound reason can deny them on mature consideration; they are as follows: the Man who called Himself Jesus Christ said before He was crucified that on the third day He would rise from the dead; the sworn enemies of that Man against their will and intention confirmed the truth of His resurrection; the disciples of that Man published His resurrection at the time when it happened, and made it so well known that it was believed by the whole world; therefore it is infallibly certain that Jesus Christ rose from the dead. Mark the efficacy of this argument.

First, because Christ foretold He would rise on the third day after His death.

In the first place Christ foretold it during His life, not only once, but often, clearly indicating the time and circumstances of His resurrection, and how and where He would show Himself after that event. The four Gospels (and even if they were not inspired, yet they are historical evidence which all of sound reason have accepted up to the present time) are full of similar prophecies. "From that time," says St. Matthew, "Jesus began to show to His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the ancients and Scribes and chief priests, and be put to death, and the third day rise again."¹ Not to His disciples alone did He say this; He declared it openly without hesitation before all the people, to the Jews, the Scribes, the high-priests themselves, and that frequently: and to impress it more on their minds He explained it by similes. You ask Me, He said to the Jews, as we read in the Gospel of St. John, by what authority and power I use the rod to drive the buyers and sellers out of the temple? That you may know who I am: "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up,"² that is: destroy My body; I give it up to your fury; do with it as you please; but know that after three days I will restore it to its present condition. "But He," continues St. John, "spoke of

¹ Exinde cœpit Jesus ostendere discipulis suis quia oporteret eum ire Jerosolyman, et multa pati a senioribus et scribis et principibus sacerdotum, et occidi, et tertia die resurgere.—Matt. xvi. 21.

² Solvite templum hoc, et in tribus diebus excitabo illud.—John ii. 19.

the temple of His body.”¹ You desire, said Christ, speaking on another occasion to the Pharisees, to see a sign and miracle from Me; no other sign shall be given you but that of Jonas the Prophet: “For as Jonas was in the whale’s belly three days and three nights, so shall the Son of man be in the heart of the earth three days and three nights.”² There you have a sign that no one but God can give you. And the Jews understood Him well enough, and knew that the report of His resurrection had already got about among the people. For immediately after His death they ran to Pilate and said: “Sir, we have remembered that that seducer said while He was yet alive, After three days I will rise again. Command therefore the sepulchre to be guarded until the third day; lest perhaps His disciples come and steal Him away, and say to the people: He is risen from the dead.”³

From this I argue: If Jesus remained dead, and did not rise again, then His prophecies are false evidently, and clearly prove Him to be an impostor, nay, the greatest of all impostors that the world ever saw; for He pretended to be God which He was not. Truly, say the Jews, that is the light in which we consider Him. But to speak of the matter a little more reasonably: supposing such to be the case (forgive me, Jesus Christ my true God! I only imagine this to make Thy glory clearer!), suppose He is not God, and knew He could not rise from the dead; then indeed He would have been the most foolish of men to utter such prophecies so circumstantially. For, what reason would He have had forso doing, since He had already worked miracles enough to obtain for Him the appearance and name of God? His object was to show that His doctrine is true, and that after His death it would be received all over the world. He wished also to confirm His miracles thereby, and to assure the Jews as well as His disciples that even after death He would be recognized and adored in the whole world as the true God. Now, is it reasonable to suppose that He would use for that purpose means that immediately after His death would show Him clearly to be a liar and impostor? What sensible man could imagine such a thing? No! if He were minded to deceive He would have said nothing of the resurrection, since He would have known it to be impossible. Or was

He would not have foretold it if He knew it would not happen.

¹ Ille autem dicebat de templo corporis sui.—John ii. 21.

² Sicut enim fuit Jonas in ventre ceti tribus diebus et tribus noctibus; sic erit Filius hominis in corde terræ tribus diebus et tribus noctibus.—Matt. xii. 40.

³ Domine, recordati sumus quia seductor ille dixit adhuc vivens: post tres dies resurgam. Nunc ergo custodire sepulchrum usque in diem tertium: ne forte veniant discipuli ejus, et furentur eum; et dicant plebi: surrexit a mortuis.—Ibid. xxvii. 63, 64.

it His object to make a great name for Himself before the world? In that case what necessity was there for Him to appoint a certain fixed time, the third day after death, for the resurrection? He might well have known that His body, not yet decayed, could have been examined before the lapse of that time, and His prophecy being falsified, He Himself would thus be clearly detected as an impostor. So that it would have been better for Him to have foretold the resurrection for some indefinite time in the future, just as false prophets do who foretell things, but are careful not to specify the time when they are to occur. Now Christ clearly, frequently, and certainly appointed the third day for His rising from the dead, making no account of what His enemies might do to oppose Him; that was a proof of a certain, infallible knowledge that His resurrection would really happen. Therefore, as His dead body was not found anywhere after the time appointed, this prophecy of Christ under those circumstances is an undeniable and to all reasoning minds a sure proof of His resurrection. "He is risen; He is not here."¹

The sworn enemies of Christ against their will testify to His resurrection: for they guarded the grave with their own soldiers.

But why do I delay so long with those proofs, since the very enemies of Christ confirm the truth even by their efforts to deny it? Where are ye, ye Jews? Now at last you have won your case, and obtained what your envy so long prompted you to seek. The Prophet Jeremias introduces your Scribes, Pharisees, and learned men thus speaking of Christ in their councils: "Let us cut Him off from the land of the living, and let His name be remembered no more."² He works so many miracles, He draws all the people after Him by His sermons, and we are gradually losing the respect and authority that belong to us; He must absolutely be put out of the way: "Let us condemn Him to a most shameful death;"³ to the gibbet with Him, that His honor and name may die with Him forever, and that He may be henceforth a disgraceful thing in the sight of men. Rejoice! your wish is at last fulfilled: Jesus is murdered; there He lies in the grave, buried in the earth! But I see that, although He is dead, you have not lost all fear of Him, for what is the object of sending those soldiers and sentinels to guard His tomb? You know, my dear brethren, how carefully the Pharisees and high-priests endeavored to prevent any false rumor from being spread abroad about the rising of Our Lord from the dead. Therefore they

¹ Surrexit; non est hic.

² Eradamus eum de terra viventium, et nomen ejus non memoretur amplius.—Jer. xi. 19.

³ Morte turpissima condemnemus eum.—Wis. ii. 20.

went to Pilate and begged of him to give them a guard to place at the sepulchre. Now, as St. John Chrysostom remarks, if Pilate had sent some of his own troops to form this guard the Jews might afterwards have said that those soldiers, not belonging to their party, had either taken away the body or through carelessness allowed it to be stolen. But that the Jews themselves might be witnesses to the resurrection, God arranged that Pilate should leave the guarding of the sepulchre to them: "You have a guard," said he to them; you have your own soldiers and sentinels; "go, guard it as you know;"¹ look after the matter as you wish yourselves.

But this did not satisfy them; they took further precautions: "And they departing, made these sepulchre sure;" they went and saw that the tomb was safely closed with a huge stone that they caused to be rolled before the entrance: a stone so large that it required many men to move it. Besides that they sealed it with their own seal, to prevent all treachery; and as a final precaution they placed sentinels around the tomb to watch it day and night.² Oh, what glory for the majesty of Our Saviour Jesus Christ! says a holy Father; it was not a living enemy that was thus guarded, but a dead corpse, without soul, without power of motion; this it was that inspired them with such fear and apprehension. When they came to take Him during His life, they brought a rabble crowd, armed with clubs and swords; but now that He is dead, they depute regularly trained soldiers to watch over His body. Why is that, I again ask you, O Jews? Why do you feel such dread? Why should you fear a dead Man? "We have remembered that that seducer said: After three days I will rise again:" that was the sole cause of their fear; therefore they took precautions to prevent His rising again. O fools that ye are! If you believe that He is an impostor, whose prophecy is a mere fiction, why should you fear that He will rise from the dead? Let Him lie where He is, and rot in the grave; you need not guard Him so carefully. Or are you afraid that perhaps He may have spoken the truth, and that He really has the power to restore Himself to life? In that case your soldiers, if they were a hundred thousand strong, could not prevent Him from doing as He pleases. If He is able to rise from the dead, He is true God, whom neither lock nor door, nor arms, nor soldiers can withstand. No, they say; we watch lest His disciples

And sealed
it with
their own
seal.

¹ *Habetis custodiam; ite, custodite sicut scitis.*—Matt. xxvii. 65.

² *Illi autem abeuntes munierunt sepulchrum, signantes lapidem, cum custodibus.*—Ibid. 66.

should come and steal away the body, and then tell the people that He is risen from the dead, and so the last error would be worse than the first. For, what a shame it would be for people to believe that He whom we crucified and put to death is again alive? To prevent such a gross mistake as that, we have set the watch; and well you have managed indeed! Keep your eyes open then, and see that the dead Man does not escape you! But what will be the result of all your diligence? This alone, that you yourselves must be the first witnesses and preachers to announce the resurrection of Christ, for you will not be able to find the slightest pretext for hiding it.

Nay, they
lies they
told about
it confirm
its truth all
the more.

And so it happened in reality, my dear brethren. Let us continue to consider the well-known history. On the third day, early in the morning, writes St. Matthew, "Behold some of the guards came into the city," pallid with fear and terror, "and told the chief priests all things that had been done;" how in the morning, as they were on guard at the sepulchre, they felt a mighty earthquake, and saw a snow-white apparition, whereupon they all fell as if dead to the ground; when they came to their senses, they found the grave open, and the linen cloths in it, but no trace of the dead body. What say you now, O high-priests? Alas! what are we to do? This completely upsets all our plans! "And they being assembled together with the ancients," the whole synagogue panic-stricken, knew not what to do. At all events, said they one to the other, we must hide all this from the people. Ah, dear soldiers, be faithful to us! See, here is plenty of money for you! "They taking counsel, gave a great sum of money to the soldiers, saying: Say you, His disciples came by night, and stole Him away when we were asleep." But, replied the soldiers, if we say that, we shall betray ourselves, and convict ourselves of a lie; and what will the governor do to us, if he hears that we slept at our post? Be not anxious on that head, answered the priests; we shall take on ourselves the blame of that: "And if the governor shall hear of this, we will persuade him, and secure you. So they taking the money did as they were taught."¹

For it was
impossible
for the dis-
ciples under
the circum-
stances to
steal the
body of
Our Lord.

O foolish, senseless people! says St. Augustine; what are you thinking of to bring forward sleeping witnesses?² Do you not

¹ Ecce quidam de custodibus venerunt in civitatem, et nuntiaverunt principibus sacerdotum omnia quæ facta fuerant. Congregati cum senioribus; consilio accepto, pecuniam copiosam dederunt militibus, dicentes: dicite quia discipuli ejus nocte venerunt et furati sunt eum, nobis dormientibus. Si hoc auditum fuerit a præsidente, nos suadebimus et securos vos faciemus. At illi, accepta pecunia, fecerunt sicut erant edocti.—Matt. xxviii. 11-15.

² Dormientes testes adhibes?

see that thereby you make your falsehoods still more evident? Foolish madness!¹ So he apostrophizes the soldiers: If you kept watch, why did you permit it? If you slept, how did you know it?² If you were awake, why did you not drive away the disciples when they came to steal the body? If you slept, how did you know that they came? And moreover, see what the disciples were supposed to do; they had to break into the garden that was guarded by soldiers, to roll away the huge stone from the opening of the sepulchre, to carry off the dead body, and again to force their way through the guards out of the garden. And that was supposed to be done by those timid disciples who so shamefully deserted their loving Master during His life, and who, when He was taken prisoner, hid themselves away in holes and corners lest they should have to share in His fate? How could they be expected so suddenly to muster up courage enough to advance against a troop of soldiers, undertake such a daring deed, and carry off a dead body that could not help or benefit them in the slightest degree? Is that credible? And can we believe that as the disciples came all the soldiers without exception should fall asleep, in spite of the strict orders they had received to watch the grave? And could the theft be accomplished so silently in the middle of a dark night as not to disturb any of the sleeping soldiers or to awaken even one of them? Who could believe that? I will give you, my dear brethren, a short description of the sepulchre of Our Lord as we learn it from those who have seen it in Jerusalem. It consists of two caves; the first, which is a sort of antechamber, is nine feet and a half long, and nearly the same in breadth; in this the soldiers kept watch. The other cave, hollowed out of the living rock, in which the body of Christ was laid, was closed, sealed with the seal of the synagogue, and moreover, as we have seen, walled up by the huge stone that they had placed at the entrance. Now I ask, how is it possible for the disciples to make their way unnoticed through the soldiers in the outer cave, to roll away the stone, to break through the door and take away the body without stumbling against any of the sentinels or waking them out of their sleep? Is that possible? Ah, foolish madness indeed!

Moreover all the linen cloths in which the body of Jesus had been wrapped, were found the next day in the sepulchre. So

As is evident from many circumstances.

¹ *Stulta insania!*

² *Si vigilabas, quare permisisti? Si dormiebas, unde scisti?*

that the robbers, in spite of their haste, must have waited to undo all those wraps and strip the body bare? Why should they do that? He who steals money, takes the purse also. And they could have carried off the body wrapped up as it was, much easier than otherwise. And where did they manage to bring it in such a hurry, that not the slightest trace of it could be found? What a stupid thing to try to persuade sensible men of such folly! Wicked priests! suppose that what you assert were true; that the disciples stole the body as you say; then they committed a crime in spite of your authority, inasmuch as they broke your seal and put your sentinels to shame. Why then did you not make some effort to apprehend them? Now you have a fine opportunity of making away with all the followers of Christ, thus destroying His memory out of the minds of men, and satisfying your most eager desire. Why do you connive at the escape of the disciples and let them slip through your fingers, although you pretend you know them to be guilty of a theft? Miserable Jews! can there be a clearer proof that the Saviour is risen than this self-evident lie of yours? My dear brethren, if the Jews had not concerned themselves at all about the dead body of Christ; if they had allowed it to lie unguarded where it was, they might have given some appearance of truth to their falsehood, and have had a better show of reason for asserting that the disciples stole the body and concealed it in order to make simple people believe in His resurrection. But now the very care and diligence they used in the matter only makes their falsehood more apparent. And it was ordained by Divine Providence that the craft they used should prove the resurrection of Jesus Christ whom they put to death: "The more they tried to conceal the truth, the more evident it became,"¹ says St. Jerome. And, as St. John Chrysostom adds: "even against their will, they helped the cause of truth."²

Thirdly,
because the
apostles
preached
the resur-
rection in
all parts of
the world.

Blind Jews, remain obdurate in spite of all this; invent one lie after another; bribe the soldiers to hold their tongues about what they saw; but you will not be able to reduce to silence the disciples of Christ, sound reason, nor the general belief of the whole world. The disciples will publish the resurrection: all the nations of earth will believe it, and adore and acknowledge their Saviour risen from the dead as the true God; and this is the

¹ Quanto amplius reservatur, tanto magis resurrectionis veritas ostenditur.—S. Hieron. in Matt.

² Vel inviti operam veritati navarunt.—S. Chrys. Hom. 90, in Matt.

third indubitable proof of the resurrection of Christ. The disciples and apostles announced everywhere that Jesus really rose from the dead: "With great power did the apostles give testimony of the resurrection of Jesus Christ Our Lord."¹ Yes, you may say; but what of that? Is it to be wondered at that the apostles who belonged to Christ's party, should do so? True; but consider for a moment the circumstances of the case. Suppose they had secretly brought off the dead body, or had heard nothing of the resurrection, what advantage would it have been for them to spread abroad a false report of Christ having risen from the dead? What reward could they have expected from Him? If He did not rise again, after all His prophecies and assurances, they had a clear proof that He had betrayed them; all their hopes would vanish; the glorious coming He foretold. His promises of continual protection and assistance, of eternal happiness and a kingdom in the next life in which they were to reign with Him, all this would then have been a mere fable. And if they had nothing to expect from Him, how could they be so foolish as to spread abroad a lie for the sake of a dead betrayer, thus not only running a great risk, but also making themselves hated by their own nation and by strangers as well, and bringing on themselves persecution, torment, and even death? And not only would such a lie have been useless to them; but they would rather have profited by declaring how they had been deceived, and would have thus gained the favor of the pharisees, scribes, high-priests, the elders of the people, and the whole synagogue. A motive of the kind was certainly more likely to have had influence with those timid disciples, who were afraid of being apprehended and dragged to death with their Master, than the mere wish to spread abroad a useless lie.

And how could they have preached the resurrection everywhere, if they themselves did not believe in it? Those very disciples were at first among those who refused to believe, and remained in doubt even after many had assured them of having seen the Lord. Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary of James, and other pious women came to the apostles, as we read in the Gospels of St. Mark and St. Luke, and told them how they had found the tomb empty, and heard from the lips of the angel the words: "Why seek you the living with the dead? He is not here; but is risen."²

Although they doubted it at first.

¹ Virtute magna reddebant Apostoli testimonium resurrectionis Jesu Christi Domini nostri.—Acts iv. 33.

² Quid quæritis viventem cum mortuis? Non est hic, sed surrexit. Luke xxiv. 5, 6.

Go and tell this to Peter and the other disciples, and say to them that they shall see Him in Galilee. "And they hearing that He was alive did not believe,"¹ says the gospel. The women insisted; Magdalene assured them she had seen the Lord, and spoken with Him. But they still refused credence: "And these words seemed to them as idle tales; and they did not believe them."² Peter the zealous prince of the apostles, and John the beloved disciple at last went to see for themselves (the others were so little inclined to believe, that they did not take even that trouble); they went to the grave, entered it, and found everything as the women had described; and yet, strange to say, their doubts were not conquered. Thomas refused to believe the other disciples who assured him they had seen the Lord, and persisted in saying: I will not believe, no matter what you say; I must first see Him myself, etc. And yet the same Thomas, Peter, and John, incredulous as they had been at first, afterwards went through the world publicly preaching the resurrection of Christ to all nations without fear or shame: "With great power did the apostles give testimony of the resurrection of Jesus Christ Our Lord." There is no room for deception here; this can be nothing else but the work of God.

And their preaching convinced the world of it.

And what wonderful fruit and efficacy accompanied their preaching! Imagine, my dear brethren, as I have elsewhere explained more in detail, that you see twelve poor, ignorant men, without scrip or staff or weapons going to the greatest cities of the world, presenting themselves boldly before the mightiest potentates, before the most subtle philosophers, the blindest heathens, the most savage barbarians; imagine Peter in Rome, Paul in Athens, James in Spain, Thomas in India, others elsewhere; they begin to preach; a Man, they say, named Jesus was nailed to a cross and put to death, He rose again from the dead, He is the true God whom all should adore; all your former idolatry is only an abomination of the devil, etc. What think you? If we had been among the heathens at the time, would we not have laughed at those simple men and their sermons? And yet people believed in them, although they had never before heard anything like what those men told them; the whole world believed and still believes, as we know by experience. Can that work come from any one but God, can it be anything else but a divine truth? Behold, exclaims St. Augustine, and all of sound

¹ Et illi audientes eula viveret, non crediderunt.—Mark xvi. 11.

² Visa sunt ante illos sicut e'elrumentum verba ista, et non crediderunt illis.—Luce xxiv. 11.

reason must agree with him, "the world now believes in the resurrection!" From which he deduces this conclusion: If the world believes a thing that is credible, how obstinate are they who refuse to believe! "But if it believes an incredible thing, how can we believe that the whole world gives credence to what does not merit it?"¹

There is no doubt then of the truth in this matter. The prophecies of Christ regarding His resurrection; the care taken by His enemies to prevent and hide the resurrection; the public announcement of it under the circumstances by disciples who at first refused to believe in it; the general acceptance of its truth by the world, all this proves beyond a doubt the fundamental article of our faith: "He is risen." Blind Jews, who will not see in the clear light of day! What a terrible punishment this blindness is, which they called down on themselves when they cried out: "His blood be upon us and upon our children!"² Glory then to our faith, my dear brethren! Christ is risen. Alleluia! Praised be God! "Blessed be the God and Father of Our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy hath regenerated us unto a lively hope, by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead!"³

Therefore Christ is truly risen from the dead.

Rejoice, ye true Christians, that you have in preference to so many others, the happiness to believe in Jesus Christ! "Blessed are they that have not seen, and have believed."⁴ Therefore Christ is true God; therefore His gospel and all the gospel truths are infallible and holy; therefore we should and must order our lives according to those truths; therefore we serve a living, immortal, glorious, eternal King and Lord, who knows and sees all our wants and necessities; a Lord who hears all the prayers and petitions we send forth to Him, and can save us from all danger; a Lord who knows how to pity our weakness, since He Himself endured all kinds of miseries even to death; a Lord who has the power and might to reward most abundantly every service rendered Him; a Lord who will restore to an immortal life in eternal glory this flesh of ours, if we now mortify and crucify it for His sake; a Lord of whose kingdom there will be no end:

Conclusion to serve Christ alone, the true God.

¹ Si autem res incredibilis credita est, hoc utique incredibile est, sic creditum esse, quod est incredibile.

² Sanguis ejus super nos, et super filios nostros!—Matt. xxvii. 25.

³ Benedictus Deus et Pater Domini nostri Jesu Christi, qui secundum misericordiam suam magnam regeneravit nos in spem vivam, per resurrectionem Jesu Christi ex mortuis!—I. Pet. i. 3.

⁴ Beati qui non viderunt, et crediderunt.—John xx. 29.

“Of His kingdom there shall be no end.”¹ Truly, O triumphant King of kings, living, eternal God, Jesus Christ! as such I adore Thee, and all living creatures in heaven and on earth bless Thee that Thou hast been pleased not only to die on the cross to save me from eternal death, but also because Thou hast arisen from the dead in glory to prepare glory for me in Thy kingdom! On this day I will arise out of my tepidity to a better and more zealous life; I give myself over to Thee completely, body and soul, and all that belongs to me, that Thou mayest do with me as Thou pleasest, as my absolute Lord and Master, working out in me Thy good will and pleasure! I protest before heaven and earth that I acknowledge no other supreme Lord but Thee, whom I am determined to serve till the end of my life with all my strength; and that I belong to no one but Thee; that I do not wish to live any more according to the law of the world, the flesh, or the devil, but according to the principles Thou hast laid down for my guidance in Thy holy gospel; that I will love nothing and no one any more unless Thee or for Thy sake! Here after Thy example will I crucify my flesh and mortify it that I may one day rise with Thee in glory, the hope of which Thou hast given me by Thy resurrection. Change me altogether into Thyself, that I may say with Thy holy apostle: “And I live, now not I: but Christ liveth in me. And that I live now in the flesh: I live in the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and delivered Himself for me.”² Amen.

TWENTIETH SERMON.

ON THE TRIUMPH OF CHRIST IN HIS RESURRECTION.

Subject.

1. Jesus Christ is a victor over the rage of hell. 2. He is a victor over the envious Jewish world.—*Preached on Easter Sunday.*

Text.

Jesum quæritis Nazarenum, crucifixum: surrexit.—Mark xvi. 6.

“You seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified: He is risen.”

¹ Regni ejus non erit finis.—Luke i. 33.

² Vivo autem, jam non ego, vivit vero in me Christus. Quod autem nunc vivo in carne, in fide vivo Filii Dei, qui dilexit me, et tradidit semetipsum pro me.—Gal. ii. 20.

Introduction.

Rejoice, ye demons of hell! Exult, ye envious Jews on earth! What you so eagerly sought for, you have at last obtained! He whom you could not bear the sight of during His life, now lies in the grave: Jesus Christ, your hated Enemy, is crucified and buried: "He is cut off out of the land of the living."¹ Now is your wish fulfilled. But wait a little; do not give too lively an expression to your joy until you are sure of your triumph. He who throws a stone straight up in the air, must expect it to fall down on his own head. And so it is to-day, my dear brethren, with the enemies of Christ. You seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified; why should you seek the living among the dead? He is risen, and has put all His enemies to shame. How? By the very means they used to destroy Him; as I shall now show to the eternal glory of Our Saviour risen from the dead, on this day of His triumph.

Plan of Discourse.

Jesus Christ in His resurrection conquers the rage of hell; as I shall prove in the first and longer part. Jesus Christ in His resurrection conquers the envious Jewish world; the second part.

O triumphant Redeemer, Conqueror of the living and the dead, be conqueror too of our hearts! Such shall be the conclusion, and at the same time the grace we humbly implore through the intercession of Thy dearest Mother and of the exulting angels.

The act of one of the disciples of Christ in faithlessly betraying his Lord and Master, whom he looked on as the true God, into the hands of murderers to be led to the slaughter, must be attributed to something more than the mere desire of earning thirty miserable pieces of silver. The bitter hatred of the soldiers and Jews against the meek Saviour who bore all injuries in such silence, against the innocent Lord whom they could not prove guilty of any crime, against the beneficent Lord, who, as every one knew, conferred benefits of all kinds on the people; the hatred that inspired them with such unheard-of cruelty, so that they tortured Him more than the sentence pronounced against Him required, spitting in His face, buffeting Him, reviling Him in the most opprobrious language, in mockery pressing the crown of thorns deep into His sacred head, and committing several sim-

The devil caused Jesus to be condemned to death.

¹ Abscisus est de terra viventium.—Is. liii. 8.

ilar acts of cruelty for which they had received no authority from the judge; that was indeed not human; for nature has endowed all men with feelings of compassion, so that we cannot behold even a thief or murderer slowly tortured to death, without pitying him from our hearts. So it is, my dear brethren; the rage of hell suggested and inspired this barbarity, this inhuman savagery against Our Lord. Of Judas the traitor the Gospel of St. John says positively enough: "The devil having now put into the heart of Judas Iscariot the son of Simon to betray Him."¹ Of those who so unmercifully scourged and tortured Jesus, St. John Chrysostom says that they were all possessed by the devil; and that we may easily conclude from the fact that while He was actually hanging on the cross in the death-agony they continued to mock at and jeer Him; and when He complained of the bitter thirst that tormented Him, they gave Him nothing but gall and myrrh to quench it; thus inflicting on Him a torture of unexampled barbarity.

Fearing that, if He lived longer, He would hurt the power of hell.

But what was the intention of the evil spirit? If he knew Christ to be the Son of God, why vent on Him a spite that he was well aware would be bootless? No, say the holy Fathers, the devil was not then sure of having to do with the Son of God; otherwise he would not have tempted Him three times in such a shameless fashion; he had only a doubt of Our Lord's divinity. But he knew Him for certain to be a most holy Man and a great Friend of God, from the many miracles He daily wrought, and from the holiness of His doctrine which He preached publicly, and daily; and he was afraid that if he left that Man longer on earth, He would convert the whole world, and free from hell so many souls that were already in the clutches of sin. Therefore he spared no effort to put Our Lord out of the way; and to further his design he kept on urging the high-priests, scribes, and pharisees against Jesus, and he succeeded at last in bringing Our Lord to the cross.

But precisely that was brought about by the death of Christ.

And now perhaps he was satisfied? By no means: he brought to pass the very thing he most dreaded. For then were verified the words written by St. Paul of Christ: "Despoiling the principalities and powers, he hath exposed them confidently in open show, triumphing over them in himself."² For the soul of Christ at once descended and broke the barriers and bolts of hell, mak-

¹ Cum diabolus jam misisset in cor ut traderet eum Judas Simonis Iscariotæ.—John xlii. 2.

² Expolians principatus et potestates, traduxit confidenter, palam triumphans illos in semetipso.—Coloss. ii. 15.

ing a prey of countless souls that had been sighing for the redemption from the beginning of the world, and freeing them from the jaws of Limbo. This was indeed painful to the evil one; but the Victor was not content with His conquest; for He commanded His angels to confine within narrower bounds the wanton and lawless princes of the world, as St. John says in the Apocalypse: "And I saw an angel coming down from heaven, having the key of the bottomless pit, and a great chain in his hand. And he laid hold on the dragon, the old serpent, which is the devil and Satan, and bound him; and he cast him into the bottomless pit, and shut him up, and set a seal upon him, that he should no more seduce the nations."¹ And in the same way He deprived the other hellish spirits of the power they formerly possessed and exercised for so many hundreds of years to the ruin of men, and to the great disadvantage of the divine service, bringing almost the whole world under their sway.

What a dreadful account history gives us, my dear brethren, of the state of the world before the death of Christ! There was hardly a country or nation, even among the chosen people of God, the Israelites, where the demon was not adored. Magnificent temples, golden and silver altars, statues of metal and stone were erected everywhere, and the hellish spirit was honored with clouds of incense in mockery of the true God. There were numbers of false priests and idolatrous ministers who by all sorts of superstitious and devilish arts deceived men and induced them to conform their lives and manners to their doctrine and false and silly teaching. Who can tell the number of gods that were then adored as true by most men, and held in high honor? In Egypt alone there were forty thousand of them; in the city of Rome, the capital of the world, nearly as many. The sun, the moon, the planets, almost all the stars of heaven received the name and honor of a deity. Fire, air, earth, wind, the sea, cows and goats, snakes and crocodiles, onions and garlic, and all sorts of vegetables, nay, what is much more foolish, even fevers and sicknesses were feared and adored as gods by whole nations. Kings and emperors bent the knee before such dumb creatures; the wisest of the Greeks, the mightiest of the Romans humbled themselves before them. If a cock crew at a certain time, an ox bellowed,

The great power of the devils over men before the death of Christ.

¹ Vidi angelum descendentem de caelo, habentem clavem abyssi, et catenam magnam in manu sua. Et apprehendit draconem, serpentem antiquum, qui est diabolus et satanas, et ligavit eum; et misit eum in abyssum, et clausit, et signavit super illum, ut non seducat amplius gentes.—Apoc. xx. 1-3.

a dog howled, a bird flew by, all these and similar nonsensical things were taken as sure signs and omens, and they were able to petrify with astonishment whole armies in the field, counsellors in the senate-house, judges on their tribunals. Even the vices themselves had their place in heaven, and there was none so revolting and abominable that had not its tutelary deity. The devils spoke plainly in several places by the statues of the idols, and gave advice and counsel in doubtful matters; they foretold what should happen, and prescribed to men the laws they were to follow; they commanded the most shameful orgies, the most cruel sacrifices to be celebrated in their honor. Thousands of sheep and cattle on such occasions, were hardly reckoned as anything; on the ordinary festival days men had to cut themselves with knives and butcher their children with their own hands. Before the altar of Lucifer alone sometimes two hundred little children, of the noblest families too, were cruelly slaughtered, as we read in history. In the city of Mexico, before the gospel of Christ was preached there, every year twenty thousand hearts of little boys and girls were offered to Lucifer, and burnt in his honor. To such an extent the devil then held the blind world under his sway and rule. O God of infinite power, how couldst Thou look on at this so long! Put an end to it! Let the time come when the words will be verified: "Now shall the prince of this world be cast out."¹

It was taken from them by Christ after His death.

Yes; even on the day when the hellish foe thought he had most consolidated his kingdom, when he brought Jesus to the cross and put Him to death, that was the glorious day of our victorious Redeemer, on which the devil was hurled down from his throne and banished to the abyss. Soon after, when the words of Christ were spoken to His disciples: "Go ye into the whole world and preach the gospel to every creature,"² the signal was given for the banishment and imprisonment of Satan. "Widespread as idolatry was throughout the world," says St. John Chrysostom, "yet it was brought to naught by the power of Christ."³ At the first arrival of the disciples of Christ the temples of the gods fell into ruins; the devils that dwelt in them were reduced to silence by the mere presence of a baptized Christian, and could not utter another word; in many places they were heard to scream and howl out: Jesus Christ

¹ Nunc princeps hujus mundi ejicietur foras!—John xii. 31.

² Euntes in mundum universum prædicate evangelium omni creaturæ.—Mark xvi. 15.

³ Gentilitas per universum orbem latissime cum patuisset, virtute Christi dissipata est.

has driven us away! And thus it is that now there is hardly any place where the evil spirits may speak by the idols as they formerly did. He who in olden times had such power over the souls of men, torturing them with magical arts, with interior and exterior pains, and leading them by violent temptations into sin, even he now lies like a chained hound to which one is wont to throw the bits of broken crusts and bones to gnaw; and he can get possession only of those foolish souls that deliberately cast themselves into his jaws. As St. Augustine says, "he is tied up like a dog with chains; he may bark, but he cannot bite unless one puts himself within the reach of his fangs."¹ Just as we sometimes see a savage bear tied to a pole with a huge stick in his paws; he growls and dances round in a circle, but may not hurt any unless those who put themselves within his reach. In nearly the same way the Apostle represents the efforts and attempts of the devil to get hold of us: "Your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, goeth about, seeking whom he may devour."²

He does indeed still assail us with violent temptations; but not before and not more violently than Jesus Christ allows him, and we, if we wish, may at the same time make his temptations serve to our own greater merit and his confusion; so that his attempts are more useful than hurtful to us. All we need do is to laugh at him and pay no attention to his assaults. The mere sign of the cross made by a little child, a drop of holy water, a bit of blessed wax, the mere pronouncing of the name of Jesus or Mary, nay, the picture of a saint is enough to put him to flight. And no matter how weak we are, we may boast in this respect that we are stronger than he. "Be subject therefore to God," says the holy apostle St. James, "but resist the devil, and he will fly from you."³ That proud spirit who wished to make himself equal to God, is now so degraded that he sometimes transforms himself into a bear, an ox, an ass, even a pig, in order to terrify men; but what can all his transformations avail him with a true servant of God? St. Hilarion, when the devil appeared to him in the shape of a huge camel, said to him in mocking tones: Your unwieldy body, O demon, does not frighten me.⁴ Foolish spirit! Do you think you can thus frighten me? It is all the same whether you come

Now the devil can do nothing against us, unless in so far as Christ allows.

¹ *Alligatus est tanquam innexus catenis canis. Latrare potest; mordere omnino non potest nisi volentem.*—S. Aug. Sermon. 197. de Temp.

² *Adversarius vester diabolus, tanquam leo rugiens circuit quærens quem devoret.*—I. Pet. v. 8.

³ *Subditi ergo estote Deo; resistite autem diabolo, et fugiet a vobis.*—James iv. 7.

⁴ *Non me terres, diabole, tanta mole corporis.*

to me as a lion, or as a hare; you still remain the same devil, who cannot injure me against my will. What are you doing here, truculent beast? cried out the dying St. Martin to him; you have no share in me. Away with you!

He must now obey men who mock at him.

That proud prince of the world, who formerly gave laws to kings and emperors, must now, conquered by the cross of Christ, humbly obey a poor hermit, a simple priest, a weak woman; when they command him in the name of Christ he must depart out of the bodies of the possessed and crawl away to the place of banishment assigned to him; he must act as servant and lackey at the command of a servant of God. St. Dominic forced him to hold a lighted candle in his hand to help him while engaged in study. The holy Bishop Stephen commanded him to go and frighten his people who were profaning the Sunday by dancing and drinking in ale-houses. St. Bernard forced the demons to speak of the joys of heaven and the terrors of hell out of the mouths of possessed persons as a warning and exhortation to the bystanders. While Father de Castillo, who had been much plagued by the demons during his life, was lying on his death-bed, the hellish spirits cowered down humbly before him and begged him to forgive them, and not to take revenge on them. Father Bernard Colnago seized the devil who had come to tempt him, and tied him fast to the bed with his girdle, so that the demon had to lie there like a dog, or else be beaten. The same Colnago was once driving the devil out of a person, and said to the evil one that he might go into his room if he wished; oh, no! exclaimed the devil; I know what you will do to me there; I will never go there again! Thus the unhappy spirit is, as it were, annihilated by the triumph of Christ, as the Prophet David foretold: "In his sight the malignant is brought to nothing;"¹ he has no power, can do nothing but whatever Christ allows him and men freely give him leave to do. And this he acknowledged to St. Antony, when he approached quite humbled and dejected and asked the saint what he wished him to do. Behold, he said, I have neither place, nor state, nor arms. How is that? asked Antony. Ah, he cried out, the name of Christ resounds in every province, and at the sound of that name I must tremble and fly!² O wretched spirit! I would now wish to ask you how it is that you speak in such a different strain to that in which you former-

¹ Ad nihilum deductus est in conspectu ejus malignus.—Ps. xiv. 4.

² Nullum habeo locum, nullam possideo civitatem, nulla sunt arma. Per omnes provincias Christi personat nomen.

longings to have Him amongst them; and now that He is in their midst, they cannot bear the sight of Him, nor can they find rest or ease until they have put Him out of the way. Tell me, thankless men, and you especially, Jewish people who were chiefly guilty of the murder of our God, why have you raged to such an extent against your Saviour? Or did you perhaps not recognize Him in spite of the many proofs He gave of His identity, or was your obstinacy so great that you refused to be convinced? And what harm had that Man done you, who found death at your hands? Nay, what good had He not done you? If you refuse to answer, then let all the blind, lame, deaf, dumb, lepers, paralytics, dropsical, and possessed people whom He freed from their miseries in your towns and country districts, let them speak for Him. Hear what the poor and hungry have to say, whom He fed miraculously; the ignorant whom He publicly instructed; all these will cry out: "He hath done all things well,"¹ and He is our greatest Benefactor. What has given you cause to nourish such envy and hatred against Him?

For fear of losing their kingdom.

"What do we, for this Man doth many miracles? If we let Him alone so, all will believe in Him."² "Behold, the whole world is gone after Him."³ The children cry out in the streets with joy and exultation: "Hosanna to the Son of David: Blessed is He that cometh in the name of the Lord: Hosanna in the highest."⁴ What are we to do? If we tolerate Him any longer there is an end of our synagogue, and of the splendor of our temple, which He boasted of being able to overthrow and in three days to rebuild. "The Romans will come and take away our place and nation."⁵ Such were the counsels given by the high-priests, pharisees, and scribes in their assemblies against Our Lord; such were the sentiments they entertained through hatred and envy of Him. And of course they at once came to the impious resolution not to tolerate Him any longer. "It is expedient for you," said Caiphas, "that one man should die for the people, and that the whole nation perish not."⁶ Crucify Him! To the cross with Him! We must blot out His name from the number of the living, and so

¹ Bene omnia fecit.—Mark vii. 37.

² Quid facimus, quia hic homo multa signa facit? Si dimittimus eum sic, omnes credent in eum.—John xi. 47, 48.

³ Ecce mundus totus post eum abit.—Ibid. xii. 19.

⁴ Hosanna filio David: benedictus qui venit in nomine Domini: Hosanna in altissimis.—Matt. xxi. 9.

⁵ Venient Romani et tollent nostrum locum et gentem.—John xi. 48.

⁶ Expediit vobis ut unus moriatur homo pro populo, et non tota gens pereat.—Ibid. 50.

destroy Him that not a memory of Him survives. "From that day therefore they devised to put Him to death."¹ Go on then with your wicked plans and schemes! Their cleverness is worthy of you! You have nailed Him to the cross and blotted Him out from the number of the living; and you shout aloud: "His blood be upon us and upon our children!"² Unhappy wretches that you are! In a very few years' time you shall feel the effects of the vengeance taken for His blood in yourselves and in your children!

"The Romans will come!" O true prophets! Indeed they will come, and much sooner than you imagine, and they will destroy your nation. Thy enemies, O city of Jerusalem, shall surround thee with a wall and encompass thee on all sides; thy women shall devour their own children through hunger; thy foes shall level thee to the ground, nor shall they leave in thee one stone on another. Your kingdom, O Jews, your priesthood, your honor and glory shall be taken from you; of your temple there shall not be a trace left. So did Jesus Himself prophesy regarding you with tears in His eyes; and you were afraid that such should be your fate if you did not put that Man out of the way. You accomplished your design when you murdered Him, and yet your fears are realized. The Emperor Vespasian was the instrument chosen by God to take this vengeance on you. Wonderful, my dear brethren is the manner in which the destruction of the city and people of Jerusalem was accomplished. Before Pilate sentenced Jesus to death, he protested publicly that he was forced thereto by the obstinacy of the Jews; in the same way before the Emperor Vespasian destroyed the city of Jerusalem he protested before heaven and earth that he did so against his will, and that the obstinacy of the inhabitants forced him to deliver it to the fury of his soldiers. St. Augustine remarks that this calamity occurred also on a feast day, the same festival day on which they crucified Our Lord; nay, even that Jews from foreign lands, who to the greater ignominy of Our Lord were present at His death, were also in Jerusalem at the time when God was wreaking His vengeance on it.

They "will take away our place and nation!" Our nation shall be driven out of the land! Truly you are again wonderful prophets of the destiny you feared! You yourselves are at this

That happened to them after the death of Christ.

They are now scattered throughout the world,

¹ Ab illo ergo die cogitaverunt ut interficerent eum.—John xi. 53.

² Sanguis ejus super nos et super filios nostros.—Matt. xxvii. 25.

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enslaved
and de-
spised.

very day the living proof of this. "The Jews," says St. Augustine, "are scattered over the whole world."¹ The Jewish people, as we know from daily experience (just as the quartered body of the murderer and highway robber is suspended at the four boundaries of the land), are dispersed everywhere throughout the globe; they are hated and despised by all other nations, they are kept everywhere in lamentable subjection, they are an object of scorn and ridicule to all, so that there is not even a child found to compassionate them in their misery and in the persecutions they have to suffer. "They are scattered, and they bring with them the documents that prove the triumph of Christ."²

While the
name of
Christ,
which they
wished to
destroy, is
spread
everywhere.

"The whole world is gone after Him:" so you said and imagined that you had reason to burst with envy. But your foresight did not deceive you, as David says: "Their sound hath gone forth into all the earth," the sound namely of those who preached Jesus, the God whom you crucified, "and their words unto the ends of the world."³ There is not a country under the sun, in Europe, Asia, Africa, America, in which His gospel has not been preached and received. Thousands even of your own nation, and even some of those who uttered the impious cry: Crucify Him! crucify Him! were on the following day of Pentecost in your own city of Jerusalem seen to fall down at the feet of Peter and publicly to confess Jesus. Truly indeed "all will believe in Him." At the sound of that glorious name that you tried to blot out of the memory of men, all shall bend the knee in heaven, on earth, and under the earth. Everywhere in the Christian world we hear the salutation uttered in your despite: "Praised be Jesus Christ!" The nails, the thorns, the lance, and other instruments of the passion with which you tortured Him, are exposed here and there in Christian churches to the veneration of the public; the cross, then looked on as a sign of ignominy, as an accursed tree, on which you hung Him as a malefactor exposed to the scorn of the world, that cross is now venerated on bended knee. The sign of that cross adorns the crowns of the kings, emperors, and monarchs of the earth; and on the terrible day of the Lord you shall have to adore that cross with fear and trembling: "Then shall

¹ Sparsi sunt Judæi ubique terrarum.

² Sparsi sunt, portantes codices, quibus Christus prædicatur.

³ In omnem terram exivit sonus eorum, et in fines orbis terræ verba eorum.—*Ps. xviii. 6.*

appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven; and then shall all tribes of the earth mourn.”¹ Even the poor fishermen, because they were disciples of Him whom you crucified, shall be held in high honor, and the rulers of the world shall prostrate themselves most humbly before their tombs, and think themselves greatly honored in being allowed to show their reverence for those tombs by a devout kiss.

Thus, O triumphant Saviour, Thou hast overcome the envious world with the very weapons with which it hoped to destroy Thee! “Rule,” we cry out with Thy prophet, and with sincere congratulation, “rule Thou in the midst of Thy enemies:”² rule before their very eyes. “He shall rule from sea to sea; and from the river unto the ends of the earth.”³ “And that every tongue should confess that the Lord Jesus Christ is in the glory of God the Father.”⁴ Meanwhile, on this the day of Thy triumph, we rejoice with Thee and on Thy account. Great Monarch of heaven and earth! we have a petition to lay before Thee which Thou Thyself hast taught us in the Our Father: Hallowed be Thy name: let it please Thee to cause Thy name to be still farther hallowed, and to become greater and more glorious. Behold, there are still cities and countries that have not yet heard a word of Thy death and resurrection. Send forth true servants of Thine, that in those lands too Thy name may be known, adored, and loved! And amongst those who bear Thy name, how many nations are there not nowadays who separated from Thy true Church and involved in the errors of heresy, profess a false belief in Thee! Bring them by Thy light back to Thy fold, that they may follow the same Shepherd as we follow! But alas! we are forgetting something. For ourselves we should have asked grace first of all. For among us faithful Catholics, how many are there not who live in the wretched state of mortal sin, and groan under the yoke of the devil? Ah, Easter Confession, thou art not enough for many! Many, many there are who do not make thee properly; part of their hearts they give to the world whose maxims are quite contrary to thee, the other part to the wanton flesh, and the remainder, the least and most worthless, they give

Congratulation and prayer to Christ.

¹ Tunc parebit signum Filii hominis in caelo, et tunc plangent omnes tribus terræ.—Matt. xxiv. 30.

² Dominare in medio inimicorum tuorum.—Ps. cix. 2.

³ Dominabitur a mari usque ad mare; et a flumine usque ad terminos orbis terrarum.—Ps. lxxi. 8.

⁴ Et omnis lingua confiteatur, quia Dominus Jesus Christus in gloria est Dei Patris.—Philipp. ii. 11.

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to thee as far as outward appearances go. And among those who truly desire thee, how many there are who approach thee with cold, tepid hearts, and who are frightened from the zealous service of God by the slightest difficulty! Conqueror of hell and Ruler of the world, can hearts then be so hard, that Thou art not able to soften them? Thou wert able to move heathens and idolators, so that they believed in Thee; hast Thou less power over Thy own people, who indeed believe in Thee, although they dishonor their faith by their lives? Show on this day of Thy triumph the power and might of Thy grace, by which through true repentance and sincere amendment we shall be drawn to Thee, so that Thou mayest rule over us all, and we may all adore, honor, fear, and love Thee according to Thy holy will. Yes, O mighty Victor of the living and the dead, behold, we now submit with our whole hearts to Thy sweet yoke, and declare ourselves Thy servants forever. Thou alone shalt be Master and Lord of our hearts. Away with the world and with all the world holds that is against Thee! "We will not have it to reign over us."¹ Away with all unlawful pleasures! We will not that the concupiscence of the flesh reign over us. We once for all renounce the evil one and all his temptations to sin. We will give him no right over us. Thee alone do we acknowledge and confess publicly before the whole world, and in the most profound humility and submission we say with Thy holy Church: Thou alone art holy, Thou alone art the Lord, Thou alone art most high, Jesus Christ, with the Holy Ghost in the glory of God, the Father. To Thee alone be honor, praise, and glory for ever and ever! Amen. To Thy everlasting glory may the words resound everywhere: Praised be Jesus Christ! Praised in our hearts, by our lips, in our lives, and in all our actions. Praised be Jesus Christ! Amen.

TWENTY-FIRST SERMON.

ON THE RESURRECTION OF CHRIST AS A PATTERN OF OUR RESURRECTION FROM THE DEATH OF SIN.

Subject.

1. "He is risen:" let us see whether we are all risen from the death of sin. 2. "He is not here:" let us see whether we all have in us this sign of resurrection.—*Preached on Easter Sunday.*

¹ Nolumus hunc regnare super nos!—Luke xix. 14.

Text.

Surrexit; non est hic.—Mark xvi. 6.
“He is risen; He is not here.”

Introduction.

Alleluia! Praise be to God! resounds to-day in heaven and on earth. There is no more joyful feast for the angels in heaven, nor for men on earth, than the holy day of Easter. On earth the Catholic Church sings during this Octave: “This is the day which the Lord hath made; let us be glad and rejoice therein,”¹ because the Lord is risen from the dead. Alleluia! Blessed be God in heaven! If it is true, as Christ says, that “there shall be joy before the angels of God upon one sinner doing penance,”² how great then must not be the joy in heaven during this holy season of Easter, when, according to the law of the Church, all sinners among Catholic Christians do penance, and thus arise with Christ from the death of the soul! Alleluia! Let us be glad and rejoice on this day which the Lord hath made! But, my dear brethren, would to God that, as this joy is general, so each one of us had good reason to rejoice! Why do I say that? What is there to disturb our joy? Alas! it is the thought of those who refuse to do true penance for their sins and to arise with Christ to the life of grace. These spoil the joyousness of this feast, and I fear that there are only too many such to be found among Catholics. To see how matters stand in this respect I repeat the words of my text.

Plan of Discourse.

He is risen. Let us see whether we all have arisen from the grave of sin; as we shall meditate in the first part. He is not here. Let us see whether we all have this sign of resurrection; as we shall consider in the second part.

If we find the contrary to be the case, then drive us out of the grave, O Saviour risen from the dead, by Thy powerful grace, which we beg through the intercession of Thy holy Mother and of our holy guardian angels, that of us too it may be said with truth: He is risen; he is not here.

In the Gospel of St. Luke I find the same words: He is risen ; but with the addition of the word “indeed:” “The Lord is risen

The resur-
rection of
Christ from
the dead is

¹ *Hæc est dies quam fecit Dominus; exultemus et lætemur in ea.*—Ps. cxvii. 24.

² *Gaudium erit coram angelis Dei super uno peccatore penitentiam agente.*—Luke xv. 10.

a real resurrection.

Indeed, and hath appeared to Simon.”¹ Now we might ask: If in the gospel of Jesus Christ, as St. Jerome and St. Augustine say, not a single vain or idle word is to be found, not a word which has not an especial meaning, why is that word “indeed” used speaking of the resurrection and not of the other mysteries of faith; as if the evangelist wished to say: Believe it as certain and undoubted that the Lord is risen from the dead? Are not all the other mysteries and dogmas of faith of the same infallible truth? Why then did not St. John write: The word is indeed made flesh? Why do not the other evangelists say: Indeed He was scourged; indeed He was crucified; indeed He died? But we find that emphatic expression used only when speaking of the resurrection: “The Lord is risen indeed.” My dear brethren, there is a very good reason for this, for it serves partly to confirm our faith, and partly to instruct and help us to amend our lives. It confirms our faith; for, as I showed last year on this day, the truth of the resurrection of Christ from the dead is the foundation and basis on which rest all the other articles of faith; and if it is undoubtedly true, so must all the others be too. Thus, if it is true that Christ is really risen from the dead, then it is true that He really died. If He died, then He must be truly man; and He must be God at the same time; for no one but the Almighty God could raise Himself from the dead. No wonder then that Christ remained on earth so many days after His resurrection, and conversed, ate and drank with His disciples, so as to place before their eyes evident, tangible proof of His being truly risen. When He first appeared to the disciples, as we read in the Gospel of St. Luke, “they being troubled and frightened supposed that they saw a spirit.”² Why are you so frightened? said Our Lord to them. “See My hands and feet, that it is I Myself;” approach boldly; “handle and see: for a spirit hath not flesh and bones, as you see Me to have.”³ The Lord is risen indeed!

Our resurrection from the death of sin to a new life must also be real.

This word “indeed,” besides confirming our faith, helps also to the amendment of our lives, for the resurrection of Christ is a symbol and pattern of our moral resurrection from the death of sin to the life of grace by repentance and confession. “That as Christ is risen from the dead,” says St. Paul to the Romans,

¹ Surrexit Dominus vere, et apparuit Simoni.— Luke xxiv. 34.

² Conturbati vero et conterriti, existimabant se spiritum videre —Ibid. 37.

³ Videte manus meas et pedes, quia ego ipse sum; palpate et videte, quia spiritus carnes et ossa non habet et sicut me videtis habet.— Ibid. 39.

“by the glory of the Father, so we also may walk in newness of life.”¹ And hence when the Catholic Church during this Easter-tide binds all sinners to repent and confess that they may worthily approach the Table of the Lord, she causes to be recited in the Mass and in the Divine Office the words, “The Lord is indeed risen;” as if to say: Sinners, who are now really minded to lay aside the burden of your sins in confession, remember that Christ your Head is truly risen; that His resurrection is not a mere fable or an imaginary thing; no, it is a true resurrection! So too must your repentance be sincere, and your resurrection to a new life real.

Now is it so with every one at the present time? Or is it one of those things that have still to happen? I do not ask, my dear brethren, whether or not we have confessed our sins, or intend to confess them. He would indeed be a monster of a Catholic who would try to shirk that duty. All I want to know is this: Is the repentance, the confession of everyone of such a nature, that we may say of him with truth: he is truly risen? O confessionals of Christendom which so many enter and leave, especially at Easter-tide, if you could only speak! O hearts and consciences of Christians, if you were laid bare to the eyes of all, what deceit should, I am afraid, be found in you! Of how many confessions and absolutions might we not say, as the disciples said of Our Lord, when He appeared to them: “It is an apparition;”² it is a counterfeit penance, a mockery of confession, an illusion by which one tries to deceive himself and others as far as outward appearances go, but which cannot deceive the eye of God! These people act as if they were risen, but they are not in reality; they are and remain dead as they were before, and all they have gained by their Easter confession and communion is to bury themselves deeper in hell by a sacrilege. Would to God that this fear of mine were groundless, that I had no good reason to entertain it; but I believe there is in reality only too much reason for it.

For in what does true repentance consist? First in the cleansing and purifying of the conscience, and the whole conscience too, from the filth that disfigures it; that is, in the candid confession of all the sins we can remember having committed since our last good confession. Now I should like to know what rea-

It is a false one with many who go to confession.

Through want of preparation and candid confession.

¹ Ut quomodo Christus surrexit a mortuis per gloriam Patris, ita et nos in novitate vite ambulemus.—Rom. vi. 4.

² Phantasma est.—Matt. xiv. 26.

sonable grounds we have for thinking that this point is really attended to by those who go to confession as a rule once or twice in the year, or even only at Easter, living meanwhile in all sorts of occasions of sin, without ever examining their consciences, and while they are so to speak dealing wholesale with sin and vice, and the time comes for complying with the Paschal precept, they spend a quarter or half an hour in a superficial examen of their lives, and then rushing into the first empty confessional they find, they tell what has occurred to their memory in that short time, and demand absolution. How is it possible, I ask, for them to get rid of all the filth of their consciences in that manner, or to declare all their sins exactly, and mention the number of times they have sinned, a declaration they are obliged to make after due and careful examination? I will not say anything of those who through a sacrilegious shame deliberately disguise or conceal altogether their guilt in the confessional. O pious souls, who are wont to go to confession every month, or fortnight, nay even every week, and oftener, and who moreover are careful to examine your consciences every night before retiring to rest; even amongst your number there are many who are not satisfied with a quarter of an hour's examen before confession; but there you sit for hours together discussing your consciences with the most anxious care, fearful lest the smallest thing should escape you, and render your confession incomplete. How would you act if, through want of opportunity, you had no chance of confession for a quarter, a half, or a whole year, although you have done your best to avoid grievous sin during the time; would you be likely to hurry into the confessional after such a short and cursory examen of conscience? Yet in this respect you often do too much, and plague yourselves more than is necessary in your ordinary confessions; for you might make a better use of your time, and do some good that your over-anxious examen makes you lose. The merchant who keeps his books in order, and weekly or fortnightly looks over them, can in a moment say how his business stands. It would be far otherwise if he made an entry only now and then, and tried once or twice a year to get an idea of the state of his affairs; then indeed he would have to spend much time, and take great care so as not to make a grievous mistake.

Shown by a
smile. Therefore I doubt very much the validity of the confessions made and the absolutions received by those who thus rarely and

ill-prepared go to their Easter duties. To them we might well apply the words of the apostle St. James: "He shall be compared to a man beholding his own countenance in a glass; for he beheld himself and went his way, and presently forgot what manner of man he was." Why does the apostle compare them to a man looking at himself in a glass? Why not rather to a woman; for the opposite sex are fond of standing before the glass and looking at themselves most carefully to see if their dress is in proper order; while a man who spends more than a moment at the looking-glass, must be a very effeminate person indeed? Those people in their confessions are like the man at the looking-glass; they cast a hasty glance at the mirror of their conscience, and then go away without knowing exactly how things stand with them, and as they cannot explain clearly enough what has happened to their souls since their last confession, it is impossible to say with truth of their repentance: he is indeed risen.

Again, true repentance and a resurrection to a new life requires as an absolute necessity a true knowledge, hatred, and detestation of all past mortal sins at least; they must be hated above every other evil, and that too with the whole heart from a supernatural motive, with the earnest purpose never again deliberately and wilfully to commit a single grievous sin. O repentance and confessions of Christians, have you all, especially at Easter time, those necessary qualities? Answer this, you who hurry through your preparation; and you who go to confession without an earnest purpose of amendment, through human respect, or worldly prudence, or to keep up the appearance of being Catholics, or to avoid excommunication. Answer this, you in whose hearts the same sinful desires are still entertained, when you repent of your sins, but not of all your sins, when you purpose amendment, but not in everything, when you detest certain vices on account of the shame attached to them, or the temporal misfortune to which they have given occasion, but do not at all take into consideration the fact that you have offended God by your sins. Oh, truly, such confessions are false, blasphemous, mere fantastical illusions, and a resurrection only in outward appearance.

Through want of true sorrow and hatred of sin.

My dear brethren, there is still another reason for great fear on my part in this respect. It is true that we often see signs of

For the same reason we may not trust too

¹ Comparabitur viro consideranti vultum nativitatís suæ in speculo; consideravit enim se, et abiit, et statim oblitus est quævis fuerit.—James i. 23, 24.

much to the repentance of the dying, no matter what signs of it they give.

repentance and amendment even in the greatest sinners, when they are on their deathbeds and near the end; and we could almost swear that their contrition is sincere and earnest. They make a general confession of their whole lives, they strike their breasts humbly, sighs of sorrow break from their lips, often their eyes stream with tears, they hold the crucifix in their hands and press it fervently to their lips; sometimes they restore ill-gotten goods, or put away the person with whom they have been living in sin. Ah, beautiful signs indeed of a true resurrection to the life of grace! But Christians, what do you think of such a repentance? Hear what St. Ambrose says of it: I will not deceive you, or inspire you with any false hopes; I have little faith or confidence in such repentance.¹ St. Augustine, thou thyself according to thy own confession, wert a great sinner; wilt thou not pronounce more favorably on this repentance of the dying? What dost thou say of it? Ah, poor comfort dost thou give! "The repentance begun on the death-bed must, I fear, be but a dead and dying thing itself."² And thou, St. Jerome, wilt not thou trust to the sighs and tears of such penitents? No; I have not the least confidence in them.³ And similar answers are given me by all the holy Fathers.

Much less reason to trust in the repentance of many at Easter.

Now from this I argue as follows. If the confessions of the dying when made with such splendid signs of contrition and accompanied with all the outward circumstances of true repentance and conversion to God, yet appear so very doubtful to those holy doctors of the Church, to men specially enlightened by God, that they have no confidence in them, suspecting that in the last moments repentance may arise from the natural fear of death which exercises a sort of violence over them, and not from a supernatural sorrow for sin; how much more doubtful then must not many Easter confessions appear, in which there is no sign of true sorrow and purpose of amendment, and of a real change of life for the better? If the contrition of one who sighs and moans with the crucifix in his hand while he is standing on the brink of eternity, leaves us reasonable room for doubting whether or not it is sincere and efficacious, what opinion can we form of one who with a smile almost on his face, and after a hasty preparation, rattles off the catalogue of his sins, with perhaps less grief for having offended God, than many a one feels at the loss of a

¹ Non vos fallo; non vobis promitto.—S. Amb. lib. 2. de Pœn.

² Pœnitentia quæ a moriente tantum editur, timeo ne et ipsa moriatur.

³ Non fido.

pair of gloves. If the repentance of those sinners who defer it to the last moment, seems doubtful, even when reparation is made for injuries inflicted at least outwardly, when ill-gotten goods are restored and dangerous intimacies avoided, then, O confessions of many sinners at Easter, what are we to think of you, when not one of those signs are to be remarked in you? Ah! I fear that they are but the phantasm of a resurrection! The Lord is risen indeed! There are many ladies and gentlemen of whom that cannot be said with truth! To declare one's sins in order is a point that must be observed, when possible, as necessary to repentance; but alas! it is not by any means sufficient in itself; it is so to speak the least important of the things that constitute the resurrection of the soul. A true appreciation of the gravity of our offences against God, a true hatred and detestation from our hearts of all sin, a true and efficacious purpose to amend and begin a new life; these are the chief things without which all our confessions and all the absolutions we receive count as nothing. But how are we to know whether each and every one of us has this true contrition and purpose of amendment, and therefore whether we are truly risen from the dead? Let us go back in thought to the resurrection of Christ, as the symbol and pattern of our moral resurrection; from that we can learn what we wish to know. "He is risen:" one point; "He is not here:" the second point; which gives you the mark by which to judge of true repentance. Let us see in the second part whether we all have this mark.

Second Part.

The angel whose duty it was to announce the resurrection of Our Lord to the women who came to the sepulchre, was not satisfied with merely saying: "He is risen;" but he gave them a clear proof of the truth of his words. First, he showed them the empty grave, and asked them: "Why seek you the living with the dead? He is not here."¹ If you do not believe me, come and see for yourselves: "Come and see the place where the Lord was laid;"² you will find nothing there now. This was as much as to say that Christ had left the dwelling-place and company of the dead. There is the first proof of the truth of His resurrection. Secondly, as St. John the Evangelist writes, Peter found in the empty grave the linen cloths and the napkin in

The reality of Christ's resurrection proved by His leaving the grave and the signs of death.

¹ Quid queritis viventem cum mortuis? Non est hic.—Luke xxiv, 5, 6.

² Venite et videte locum ubi positus erat Dominus.—Matt. xxviii, 6.

which the dead body and the head of Christ had been wrapped: "He went into the sepulchre and saw the linen cloths lying, and the napkin that had been about His head;"¹ a proof that Christ had abandoned all the signs of death. The second proof of the truth of His resurrection.

If the resurrection from sin is real, the sinner must have left the place, company, and all the marks of sin.

Sinner, who have just made your Easter confession, you think and say that you are now truly risen from the grave of sin; do you wish us to believe you? Good! we are ready to do so; but you must not be satisfied with merely asserting it; you must prove it to us, so that we can have reasonable grounds for believing you. Have you completely abandoned the grave, the company of the dead in which you were hitherto? Have you put off altogether all the signs of death? From this we shall know whether you are truly risen with Christ, or whether your resurrection is only a counterfeit and a delusion; from this we shall know whether your repentance and confession is accompanied by a true hatred and detestation of your past sins, or is only empty talk.

Which is not done by those who remain in the proximate occasion.

First then I ask if you have abandoned the place, the society of the dead? By this I mean: Have you given up once for all going to that house in which you were wont to sin, to those companions with whom you used to offend God, that unlawful intimacy, which has hitherto been a stumbling-block in your way; in a word, have you renounced all the occasions of sin? You must promise the priest to do that before he can validly absolve you in the name of God. Have you honestly done so? Oh, truly if such is the case, you have given a splendid proof of the truth of your resurrection from the death of sin to the life of grace! Sheep have a natural antipathy to the wolf; not only do they run away as hard as they can when they see him coming even far off, but they cannot even bear to stand on the path by which he has recently passed; the mere smell of him frightens them. Nay, if you only show them the skin of a dead wolf, they will tremble with fear, and run off at once. In the same way a fear and horror not only of sin, but of all dangers and occasions of sin, of the very shadow of sin, is a clear sign of the true sheep of the fold of Christ, that is, of the soul really living in Christ. If you cannot furnish this proof; if you still remain in the occasion of your former vices, then, although you had promised amendment with a thousand oaths, away with you! your repentance is only illus-

¹ Introivit in monumentum, et vidit linteamina posita, et sudarium quod fuerat super caput ejus. —John xx. 6, 7.

ory and deceitful. "I know thy works," I can boldly say to you in the words of St. John in the Apocalypse; "that thou hast the name of being alive, and thou art dead."¹ You are still lying in the grave as before.

Efficacious sorrow for and detestation of sin, and at the same time a desire and love of the proximate danger and occasion of sin, are two things that cannot possibly exist in the same heart. Therefore if one came to me, who is used to go to confession every Easter or even oftener in the year, and confesses a number of a certain sort of sins, the first thing I would ask him is: How long have you been in the habit of those sins? How long have you lived with the person with whom you are wont to sin? And if he answered me candidly and said: It is now two, three, four, or more years; thanks be to God! I have never hidden anything in confession; I have always told everything truly, and done penance for all my sins! My dear child, I would reply, what a grievous mistake you are laboring under! If by confession and repentance you understand nothing but the exact declaration of your sins in the tribunal of penance, and an act of contrition and purpose of amendment which you read out of your prayer-book, you are quite wrong. I readily believe that in your own opinion you have always done penance for your sins; but you must know that what you have done is but the smallest part of true penance. You have been, as you acknowledge, so many years in the proximate danger and occasion of sin; you have never renounced it, and therefore I cannot believe that you have had true sorrow and a firm purpose of amendment. Your past confessions are not of the least value, and when you received absolution, you either deceived your confessor by keeping from him the knowledge of your state, or else he did not know his duty or perform it as he should have done. Go! I cannot help you, although it is Easter Sunday, until I know that you have really got rid of the occasions of sin. So, my dear brethren, should I speak, and so should every confessor speak who does not wish to damn himself along with his penitent. It is the undoubted teaching of sound theology, and the contrary is condemned by the Church, that he cannot be absolved from his sins who is not earnestly minded to avoid once for all the occasions of sin. Let no one then say, as many do who deceive themselves: I have been to confession and received absolution; now I am free from all my sins; I am risen! Not at

No one can be absolved without leaving the proximate occasion.

¹ Scio opera tua, quia nomen habes quod vivas, et mortuus es.—Apoc. iii. 1.

all! Such people are called by the Holy Ghost, "a generation, that are pure in their own eyes, and yet are not washed from their filthiness."¹ O sinner, I cannot believe that you are really risen with Christ from the death of your soul, until I shall be able to say of you to the evil one what the angel said to the women: "Why seek you the living with the dead? He is not here, but is risen." Behold the place where he lay when under your yoke, dead to grace; behold the house to which he used to resort to commit sin; he is not to be found there any more since his Easter confession. Behold the person with whom he was wont to associate for unlawful purposes; he is not to be found in that company any more; he has given it up for good. This first proof of the reality of the resurrection is clear enough, but it is not sufficient.

Nor do they truly rise, who show no sign of amendment.

The second, which concerns also those who are not in the proximate occasion of sin, consists in laying aside all the signs of death, that is, in changing one's life for the better, so that one can say of himself with truth: I am not as I used to be. You go into your garden with an axe and make a deep cut into the stem of a green and thriving fruit-tree; you wish to know whether the axe has reached a vital point of the tree, or not. How do you manage? Only have a little patience, and the tree itself will tell you all you wish to know. For if the leaves begin to wither, the branches to decay, and the fruit to dry up, there is no doubt that the axe has killed the tree. But if it remains in its former condition, and you see no change in it, the leaves remaining green, then you have a proof that the tree is not injured. O confessions that leave men after Easter as they were before, so that no change for the better can be seen in them, and they retain the old desires of the heart, the old wantonness of the outward senses, the same manner of conversation, the same customs and usages; ah, truly your repentance has not touched the quick! A confession and repentance of the kind is in need of another repentance and confession! St. John Chrysostom once met a man coming out of the confessional, and addressed him in the following terms: Stop, my good sir! Whither away in such a hurry? I see that you have been to confession; show me what sins you have repented of.² Is it of curiosity and want of restraint over your eyes? No; I can see no sign of repentance in you in that direction; for you are even now casting loose glances around on persons of the

¹ *Generatio quæ sibi munda videtur, et tamen non est lota a sodibus suis.*—Prov. xxx. 12.

² *Ostende mihi cujus te poeniteat.*

opposite sex. Have you repented of hatred and anger? You say yes; but I say no; for you passed by that man there with a sour countenance, and had not even a friendly look for him. You may have confessed or not; in any case your confession is worth nothing, your repentance is useless.

Holy St. Chrysostom! come now at this Easter-tide and stand at the doors of the churches, question in the same manner all those who come out of the confessionals, and point out how many betray themselves. Vain woman, where do you come from? I have done my Easter duty; I have been to confession. Show me then what sins you have repented of. Is it of the scandal you give, by which you lead so many souls to evil? No, that cannot be; I see no sign of improvement in you in that respect; you dress in the same indecent and unlawful manner as before Easter. And you, who seem to be a Catholic man; you have been to confession, have you not? Show me then some sign to prove that such is the case; you have the same habit of cursing and swearing, you still live in hatred and enmity with your neighbor, you still are addicted to usury and injustice; and I see that you still keep possession of goods wrongfully gained. And you, young man, have you been to confession too? But you are just as idle, dissolute, and unchaste as you were before Easter. And you, young girl, have you confessed your sins? Show me then how you have left behind all the signs of death. You are just as free with your looks as before; you still keep love-letters in your possession, and are addicted to reading romances and love-stories. Away with the lot of you! Your repentance is of no value! You thought you had risen; but you are still here! You have not yet laid aside the grave-clothes; there is no change for the better in your lives; not a sign of amendment can be remarked in your conduct: "Thou hast the name of being alive, and thou art dead." In appearance indeed you are among the living; but in reality your place is with the dead. By your Easter confession you have deceived the Church, which commands you to do penance; you have deceived the priest who spoke the words of absolution over you; you have deceived the people who saw you entering the confessional; you have deceived your own souls, which you have burdened with a new mortal sin.

And there are many such.

My dear brethren, I have a better opinion of you and your repentance. If some of you have not yet made your Easter confession, for you I make my conclusion in the words of my text:

Exhortation and resolution to rise

truly by sincere repentance.

“He is risen; He is not here.” The resurrection of Christ from the dead, as the Apostle says, is a symbol and pattern of our resurrection from the death of the soul; but the Lord is risen indeed, and such too should be the character of our resurrection. Therefore we will candidly confess all our sins as far as we can remember them after careful examination; and this we shall do with true contrition, with a supernatural detestation and hatred of sin, and with an earnest and efficacious will never to commit a grievous sin again. For, why should we go to the trouble of making an invalid confession? We certainly cannot deceive the all-seeing God! And the necessary proof of our sincerity, of the reality of our resurrection, shall be the avoidance of all occasions and dangers of sin, and the earnest amendment of our lives; so that of us, as of Christ, the words may be truly said: “He is risen; he is not here.” He is not to be found where he formerly dwelt; he is become quite a different man to what he was. There is still one thing I am afraid of. And what is it? When Magdalene and her companions, of whom we read in to-day’s gospel, came to the sepulchre to anoint Our Lord’s body, they were in great concern as to how they might roll back the stone that closed the tomb. “Who shall roll us back the stone from the door of the sepulchre?” said they to one another. We weak women are not strong enough to do that, for it is a mighty and huge stone. Who shall roll us back the stone? some of us too might ask ourselves; how can we get this heavy stone off our hearts? How can I overcome my shame so as to confess my sins in their smallest details? How can I give up my old habit of sin, and at once conquer and overcome my evil passions, change my mode of life, give up the company, the intimacy I formerly delighted in, abandon drunkenness, scandalous customs, and the delights of the flesh? Ah, this is a hard nut to crack! Alas, what a heavy stone to roll away! But, dear souls, have courage! The holy women were not deterred by the difficulty from their pious project; they went on their way with confidence, and “looking they saw the stone rolled back.”¹ Courage then, sinners! Trust in the Lord! All that is required on your part is the earnest resolution of a good will; the same God who is always waiting for the repentant sinner, whose yoke is sweet and burden light, He will by His grace smooth away all difficulties, and will

¹ Qui: revolvat nobis lapidem ad ostium monumenti?—Mark xvi. 3.

² Respicentes viderunt revolutum lapidem.—Ibid. 4.

easily roll away the imaginary heavy stone from your hearts. Yes, O Lord, our will is ready; we will return to Thee, if we have not done so already, with our hearts, with our whole hearts! Do Thou show the power and efficacy of Thy helping grace, so that we may all see how easy and sweet it is to serve Thee in the state of Thy life-giving grace among the number of Thy dear children, to keep Thy law, and to love Thee alone above all things. Amen.

TWENTY-SECOND SERMON.

ON ASCENDING IN SPIRIT WITH CHRIST INTO HEAVEN.

Subject.

1. On earth there is nothing that can content our hearts; so that we should be foolish to allow them to become attached to earth. 2. In heaven alone with Christ there is everything that can satisfy us; so that we are foolish to think so little of it.—*Preached on the feast of the Ascension.*

Text.

Assumptus est in cælum.—Mark xvi. 19.

“He was taken up into heaven.”

Introduction.

Sorrowful earth from which Christ the true consolation is taken away! Happy heaven to which Christ the Joy of the angels has ascended! O mortals, why should we longer crawl about on this earth? St. Augustine cries out to us all on this feast of to-day: “Our Saviour has gone up into heaven, let us no longer grieve on this earth. Let us go up with Him, and fix our hearts on high.”¹ This is the Eagle who, flying to heaven, encourages His young to follow His example: “The eagle enticing her young to fly.”² My dear brethren, lift up your hearts above earth! Raise them to heaven! To encourage us to do this shall be the object of this sermon.

Plan of Discourse.

On earth there is nothing that can content our hearts; foolish then would it be for us to become attached to it; the first part.

¹ *Salvator noster ascendit in cælum; non ergo turbemur in terra! Ascendamus cum illo, et sursum corda habeamus.*—S. Aug. Sermon. 1. de Ascens.

² *Aquila provocans ad volandum pullos suos.*—Deut. xxxii. 11.

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In heaven alone with Christ is everything that can satisfy us; are we not then foolish to think so little of it? The second part.

Almighty God! I speak to Thee now in the words used to-day in the Holy Mass and in the Divine Office: "Grant through the intercession of Mary and Thy holy angels, that as we believe that on this day Thy only-begotten Son our Redeemer ascended into heaven, so we too may dwell in heaven in heart and spirit."

If we understood things aright we should of ourselves despise earthly goods.

If we only had a lively faith and could judge of everything as it is in itself, I should have undertaken an unnecessary task in exhorting you to withdraw your hearts from the earth and earthly things and to fix them on heaven. Who would take the trouble to advise you not to depend too much on the money you saw last night in a dream? Such an exhortation, you would say, is not wanted; what never existed cannot help me. Who would spend a long time trying to persuade a sensitive and delicate person not to do himself any harm by taking too much of a bitter and ill-tasting draught? You need not advise me in this matter, would be the reply; I do not wish to take what I dislike. Hold out to a beggar in one hand a large, and in the other a small piece of bread; you need not tell him not to choose the small one; he will have sense enough of himself to select the large piece. In the same way, if we knew how to value earthly things according to their true worth, we should not require to be deterred from loving them; they would of themselves inspire us with disgust.

And acknowledge that they cannot content the heart.

For, what is all the good that the world can offer us? Let him answer who speaks out of the infallible mouth of God, and who had all the imaginable good things that the world could give him, the wise Solomon, that most fortunate of men. "I saw in all things vanity and vexation of mind," he sighs forth in open confession, after having described his wonderful riches and treasures, the magnificence, the honors, pleasures, and delights he enjoyed; "I saw in all things vanity, and that nothing was lasting under the sun."¹ There, my dear brethren, is the judgment we should form of the things of this world; all is vanity; there is no perfection in them, but vexation of mind; everything is full of trouble and mixed with a thousand thorns and much bitterness. Nothing is lasting under the sun; everything is short-lived and inconstant, and vanishes almost in a moment; so that there is nothing that can content or satiate the human heart, which

¹ Vidi in omnibus vanitatem et afflictionem animi, et nihil permanere sub sole.
—Eccles. ii. 11.

is created for higher things, and can embrace an infinite God with its love, and is capable of possessing Him.

“I saw in all things vanity;” everything is vain, imperfect, and worthless. Let us see what happened to-day among the disciples of Christ on the occasion of His ascent into heaven. They stood there open-mouthed and staring, as the Acts of the Apostles tell us. What were they looking at? “Why stand you looking up to heaven?”¹ asked the angels. They imagined they still had their beloved Master before their eyes. But ah, He was no longer there; He had already vanished from sight. Just as when we accompany a departing friend a bit of the way to take leave of him, ten times do we turn back after having said good-bye, in the hope of still seeing him, although he is already far out of sight, and we can behold him only in imagination. There, my dear brethren, you have a picture of the vanity of all earthly goods. Many a one forms to himself heaven knows what great idea of earthly happiness; he strives and strains for it as the only object and aim of his life. Ah, says St. Augustine, you are deceived; the happiness of this world is not true happiness, it is only an illusion.² You take an empty cloud for the light; the mere outward form and shape for the reality; you think you have something if you are only rich, honored, and able to enjoy pleasure; and all the time you have nothing that can really satisfy you. Amass as much as you please, you will never attain to perfect and complete satisfaction; there will always be something wanting, some deficiency.

For they are vain and imperfect.

I call upon all men of experience to witness the truth of this. The more one has, the more he wants. How can that be, if not because what one has is not able to satisfy his heart, and because he wishes to seek in many things the satisfaction he cannot find in one. What we enjoy actually is never found to be as good as we first expected. We propose to ourselves the possession of a certain good or pleasure; we seek it, but do not yet possess it; we say like Solomon, “I said in my heart: I will go and abound with delights;” as long as the matter remains in intention alone it seems great and desirable. But when we have attained the actual enjoyment, and possessed the desired good for some time, then disgust follows, and we must acknowledge with

As experience shows.

¹ *Quid statis aspicientes in caelum?*—Acts I. 11.

² *Quasi, quasi felicitas est sæculi.*

the same Solomon: "And I saw that this also was vanity."¹ Even if the possession of a good, the taste of a pleasure delights us for a time, we are soon rendered uneasy by the desire of another that we have not and would wish to have; and this uneasiness, this impatience is the ordinary companion of the greatest pleasure.

And even
the most
fortunate
have con-
fessed.

King Achab came home full of chagrin and vexation, as we read in the Third Book of Kings: "And casting himself upon his bed, he turned away his face to the wall, and would eat no bread."² What did he want? Had his enemies made an incursion into his land? Had he perhaps lost an important battle? Did one of his sons die? No. And what then? A vineyard that he could not persuade Naboth to sell him was the sole cause of his trouble, which was so great that he could find nothing to comfort him; all his royal treasures and riches could not give him as much pleasure as the want of this handful of ground caused him pain. "Achab came into his house angry, and fretting because of the word that Naboth had spoken to him."³ The proud Aman also comes home to his wife and friends; he tells them of his great riches, and shows them how King Assuerus had raised him above all the princes of the kingdom, so that all men had to bend the knee before him, and in spite of this he adds with bitterness and displeasure: "Whereas I have all these things, I think I have nothing." Why? What was wanting to him? "I think I have nothing, so long as I see Mardochai the Jew sitting before the king's gate."⁴ This one circumstance so annoys and disturbs me, that all my riches and honors can give me no pleasure. My dear brethren, is not this the case with most, nay, almost with all men in the world? How many are made unhappy by the want of some one thing that they cannot obtain? I am rich, says many a one; but what better am I for that, if I do not enjoy good health? "I think I have nothing." I am, thank God! strong and healthy, but I have to work hard to keep off the pangs of hunger; I am so unfortunate in all my undertakings. Although I have enough of everything else, yet I should like to

¹ Vadam et affluam delicias, et fruar bonis. Et vidi quod hoc quoque esset vanitas.—Eccles. ii. 1.

² Et proiciens se in lectulum suum, avertit faciem suam ad parietem, et non comedit panem.—III. Kings xxi. 4.

³ Venit ergo Achab in domum suam indignans, et frendens super verbo quod locutus fuerat ad eum Naboth.—Ibid.

⁴ Et cum hæc omnia habeam, nihil me habere puto, quamdiu videro Mardocheum Judæum sedentem ante fores regias.—Esth. v. 13.

enjoy that position, to have the favor of that person, to own that property, to obtain that honorable post; and as long as I am disappointed in this, "I think I have nothing;" I can enjoy neither repose nor pleasure. So it goes in the world; one is in want of this, another of that; no one has all he wishes for.

When the desire for one thing is appeased, the appetite comes for something else. Therefore the Prophet Isaias compares the children of the world, who fix their hearts on earthly goods and pleasures, to a sleeping man who in his dreams is plagued by hunger and thirst, and swallows one morsel after another and one drop after another, and still remains hungry and thirsty: "And as he that is hungry dreameth, and eateth, but when he is awake his soul is empty: and as he that is thirsty dreameth, and drinketh, and after he is awake is yet faint with thirst, and his soul is empty."¹ They spend a whole day and a night in pleasures; are they satisfied? No! On the following day they must either seek out some new pleasure, or else recommence the former; they are faint with thirst. One tries to gain the favor of some great man; he succeeds; is he happy now? Not a bit of it! The honorable position he has gained only serves him now as a stepping-stone to a higher place; he is still faint with thirst. That avaricious man has at length become rich; his coffers and money-bags are full of gold; is he satisfied? No; his hopes and desires are now directed to that landed property, that inheritance; he is still faint with thirst: "And whereas I have all these things, I think I have nothing." The abyss of the heart is not yet filled up, and can never be filled with created things. So that the earth can give me nothing but what is vain and illusory. "I saw in all things vanity."

They are enjoyed as it were in a dream.

But this is not all: "I saw in all things vanity, and vexation of mind." All that the world can give me is full of bitterness. What great joy and consolation the apostles had on this day in the presence of their beloved Master! But that joy was turned into sorrow and lamentation when they had to bid Him farewell. Seek, O children of the world, seek and bring together all imaginable delights and treasures of earth; do you think you will be able to enjoy them without sorrow, discomfort, trouble, or crosses? Ah! that cannot be! You may have found beautiful roses, but they are not without sharp thorns;

They are bitter and full of trouble.

¹ Sicut somniat esuriens, et comedit, cum autem fuerit expergefactus, vacua est anima ejus: et sicut somniat sitiens, et bibit, et postquam fuerit expergefactus, lassus adhuc sitit. —Is. xxix. 8.

no sugar is so sweet as not to leave a bitter taste behind. He who has much of this world's goods must plague and torment himself lest they should be taken from him; he who has little, plagues and torments himself with his struggles to obtain more; he who has nothing is the worst off. Ah, I seem to hear a Job sighing forth: "My soul is weary of my life."¹ But I am not surprised thereat; for he was a man of sorrows, encompassed by misfortune and suffering, without help or comfort. Yet I hear the same wail of sorrow from King Solomon, even when he was actually contemplating his treasures and delights: "And therefore I was weary of my life, when I saw that all things under the sun are evil, and all vanity and vexation of spirit."² Thus speaks the monarch who, according to the testimony of God Himself and his own confession, was one of the most fortunate men on earth, who never had the least experience of adversity. No, my dear brethren, to see how bitter and unsatisfactory are all transitory earthly goods, we need not cast our eyes on the poor, frail sick man who lies in bed overwhelmed with pain, nor on the desolate, persecuted, abandoned wretches who have often to sigh and weep for a piece of bread and cannot obtain it. I acknowledge that they experience and feel nothing but the heavy burden of worldly troubles; and in our days every town and country is filled with such sufferers. But ask the great ones of earth, the spoiled children of fortune, the objects of our envy and admiration, who seem to have been born only to laugh and enjoy themselves; ask, I say, the princes, kings, and emperors of earth if they are free from all annoyance and trouble. Ah, how often they laugh with the lips, when their hearts are full of sorrow and grief, and their minds disturbed with a thousand troublesome thoughts! No matter how mighty they may be, they must all acknowledge that we live here, not in a pleasant paradise, but in a vale of tears. "I saw in all things vanity and vexation of mind."

The joy
they give
soon comes
to an end.

"And that nothing was lasting under the sun." This is the third imperfection in all earthly things: they do not last. Hardly had the apostles on this day enjoyed for a short time the sight of Jesus ascending into heaven, when He disappeared from their view: "And a cloud received Him out of their sight;"³ thus

¹ *Tœlet animam meam vitæ meæ.*—Job x. 1.

² *Tœdult in vitæ meæ, videntem mala universa esse sub sole, et cuncta vanitatem et afflictionem spiritus.*—Eccles. ii. 17.

³ *Et nubes suscepit eum ab oculis eorum.*—Acts i. 9.

there was an end to their joy. So it is too with us in our every-day life. How people plague themselves with all sorts of plans, trouble, labor, fear, hope, disturbance, desire, and longing, by day and night, to gain the happiness they wish for, or to accomplish some important business! And when they think they are on the point of success, behold the cloud comes and takes away their fortune out of their hands; some unforeseen stroke of ill-luck shatters all their plans and brings them to naught. You have brought matters so far that you are in possession of independent means, so that you can live according to the requirements of your state, and even in abundance; but the cloud comes, a lawsuit, the insolvency of a debtor, or some other misfortune makes you a poor man. At last after a great deal of trouble you have succeeded in making a friend of some great man, and thus you have risen high in the estimation of others; but the cloud comes, a calumny, a word misunderstood, some fault committed against your will, and you are in disgrace. You possess in perfect peace and security what you most desire, and for which you have long striven; but death comes and leaves you lone and desolate. There is the cloud again! To-day you boast of your health and beauty; to-morrow a fever casts you down on your bed. The cloud has come! You now, while you are still young and strong, promise yourself a long and merry life; in a short time you will be carried to your grave. The black, gloomy cloud comes and hurries you out of life away from the sight of men. For if nothing else comes in the way, death will interfere and make an end of all. Humble yourself, and acknowledge that all that earth contains is but vain, bitter, and inconstant.

O vale of tears! O troublous and miserable life to which we poor children of Adam are banished! God of love, what intention hadst Thou when Thou didst so ordain things? Art Thou perhaps pleased to see us in sorrow, trouble, and misery? But are we not Thy children whom Thou lovest more than any earthly father loves his offspring? No, my dear brethren, the intention of the Almighty is to show us that we are destined for a far higher end than this earth; and therefore He has made our sojourn here so bitter for us, that we might withdraw our hearts from earth, and fix them elsewhere. Our dear Saviour Himself endeavored to instil this into our minds when He fixed the contempt of the world, poverty and humility of spirit, as the foundation of His teaching and of the Christian life. He has gone before us by His

So that we should withdraw our hearts from them.

example; as long as He lived on earth He had nothing from the world but poverty, contempt, the cross, and sufferings. He still preaches the same doctrine by His apostles and evangelists, and tells us, as St. Peter says, that we are only strangers and sojourners whose only care should be to reach our heavenly country. But He foresaw clearly that all His teaching would profit us little by itself, and therefore He has filled the goods and pleasures of the world with vanity, bitterness, and inconstancy, so that of themselves they may become insipid to our taste, and we may experience disgust and disrelish for them.

They are foolish who are attached to such goods.

And yet, O blind mortals that we are! a world of this kind is still able to attract our hearts and our love, vain and empty as we know it to be! Here we labor as little children who build a house of clay; we plague and trouble ourselves to find happiness; our cares and desires are turned to the goods of the world; to them are directed all our efforts, as if we were to live here forever. We hold with them of whom David has said: "They have called the people happy that hath these things."¹ If we could enjoy those things forever we should think we had found a paradise. For a handful of earth, a mouthful of earthly joys we willingly sacrifice our senses, understanding, cleverness, health, and bodily strength. And as if this were not enough, "man offers a still greater sacrifice," as Tertullian says—"his salvation."² If we cannot attain to the enjoyment of those goods, if their possession is denied us, we wail and lament, and weep and moan as if we had lost all. Because we must leave them death appears so bitter to us and so terrible that we are inclined to say with the king of the Amalekites: "Doth bitter death separate in this manner?"³ And what then are we separated from? From tears, labor, troublesome cares, from crosses and misery, from all the tribulation of this painful prison. Are we to think death bitter on that account? O blind and foolish men that we are, to seek and to love our own unhappiness! Come, my dear brethren, lift up your hearts above earth! This vale of tears is not worth our love; the whole world with all its pomp and splendor is far too small for us, far too vile and worthless for our lofty minds; nothing of earth can fill, satisfy, or content the capacity of our hearts.

¹ *Beatum dixerunt populum cui hæc sunt.*—Ps. cxliii. 15.

² *Majorem hostiam cædit, salutem suam.*

³ *Siccine separat amara mors?*—I. Kings xv. 32.

Second Part.

Where then shall we turn? For our heart cannot be at rest until it finds an object that it can love. Whither shall we turn our thoughts? There where Christ our Head, our King, our Father has ascended on this day. Raise your minds to heaven! To heaven direct your desires, wishes, sighs, cares, labors, and troubles! Heaven is the only end for which we are created; heaven is the fatherland to which we are travelling; heaven is that place of joys where our hearts shall be satisfied and filled with all repose and delight. Heaven is that one thing necessary of which Christ spoke to Martha, that one necessary thing for which we must strive. If we do not get there, then wo to us for all eternity! If we arrive there, then let things go with us here as they will! Christian hearts! is it indeed necessary to seek eloquent arguments and striking proofs to inflame and encourage you to desire heaven? O heaven, disclose thyself only for a moment that we may cast a glance on thee, and see what goods thou hast prepared for us; then indeed there would not be one in the world who would not faint with desire for thee! But thou art now bolted and barred against our bodily eyes; not however against the eyes of our faith, by which we exclaim with the Prophet: "I believe to see the good things of the Lord in the land of the living."¹ All the goods that I now see on earth are vain, imperfect, unsatisfactory, short-lived, inconstant; they are not the good things of the Lord; there on high in the land of the living I shall find the contrary to be the case, and shall have real good things to enjoy.

"O good things of the Lord," exclaims St. Augustine; "O sweet, immortal, imperishable goods!"² Goods perfect without stain, sweet without bitterness, endless without diminution! Why? Because the Good that we shall possess there is the infinite God Himself, who, as the Apostle says, shall be all in all to the just: "God all in all."³ A good in this world, no matter how great it may be, is still only one good in itself separated from others. Gold, precious as it is, cannot give us light; outward beauty and splendor ravish the eyes, but not the ears; music delights the hearing, but not the touch; delicious food and drink are pleasing to the palate, but do not affect the other senses; and

In heaven is everything to content our hearts.

For there there are true and perfect goods.

¹ Credo videre bona Domini in terra viventium.—Ps. xxvi. 13.

² O bona Domini, dulcia, immortalia, interminabilia!

³ Deus omnia in omnibus.—I. Cor. xv. 28.

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if one of these senses is dissatisfied, then we cannot say that our happiness is complete. In heaven everything shall be perfect because God shall be all in all! All that can delight the five senses, all that can rejoice the heart, all that man can wish and desire: All in all.

**Goodsweet
without
bitterness.**

Oh, how sweet are the good things of the Lord, without difficulty, bitterness, or sorrow! St. John gives us in the Apocalypse a detailed description of this: "They shall no more hunger nor thirst, neither shall the sun fall on them, nor any heat."¹ No excessive heat, no biting cold, no threats, no pain, no care, no disquiet shall have to be feared there! There shall be constant health without sickness, an ever blooming youth without old age, a perfect beauty without fault, peace without disturbance, security without fear, abundance without want, joy without sorrow, satiety without disgust. There the possession of the supreme Good shall not make us tired forever; always shall we be desiring, always satisfied; in a word, as I cannot in any case find words to describe heaven, "Say to the just man that it is well,"² says the Lord; go, My prophet, and tell them that it shall be well with them; go, ye preachers of the New Law, and announce the same tidings over the whole world: "that it is well." Oh, my dear brethren, what a vigorous expression that is, "it is well!" O souls, enter into heaven; there it shall be well and perfectly well with you! Ask me no more about it; for in that word all is included that I can know or say to you: It shall be well with you!

**Eternal
without
end.**

O goods of the Lord, interminable without diminution! It is in this that the greatest happiness consists, namely that we shall never have to fear that our good fortune will come to an end. You rejoice in the possession of some earthly good; but how long does your joy last? Till to-morrow? You know not. But when you are in heaven how long will it last? For all eternity. The good things in and with which we shall be delighted, shall never leave us, because they are immortal; we shall never leave them, because we shall be immortal; they shall never be taken away from us by violence, for the wicked shall be shut up in hell; they shall not be lessened by envy, because we shall be united in God; nor shall they be taken from us by any change in the divine will, because God is faithful, and will not depart

¹ Non esurient neque sitient amplius, nec cadet super ullos sol, neque illis aestus.—Apoc. vii. 16.

² Dicite justo quoniam bene.—Is. lli. 10.

from His promise: "Your joy no man shall take from you."¹

O good things of the Lord! O heaven! how is it that men think so seldom of you, desire you so little, are so chary of working to gain you; as if that happiness were nothing to us, as if the great things told us of heaven were mere fables! Ah, sighs forth St. Augustine, "If I told you that God had promised to give you a great sum of money, you would rejoice."² "He has promised Himself, and you are unmoved;"³ He has promised heaven, and you are not inflamed with desire; you remain cold and uninterested, and go away sorrowful! In truth it is sad to see the bestial stupidity in which most men live. Their thoughts are directed only to earthly things; their desires rest in what they see and hear in the present time; what may come hereafter troubles them least of all. Imagine that in a princely palace a great feast is given; the sound of beautiful music and harmonious voices is heard in the street; all that we hear and see shows that some unusual pleasure is being enjoyed in abundance. Meanwhile in the courtyard of the palace a horse stands in the stable eating his corn; the music resounds in his ears; what does he do? He takes not the least notice of it, but goes on eating. Lackeys with gold and silver laced uniforms run here and there; the horse sticks to his corn. The most costly viands are carried past; but the horse feels no appetite for them, and goes on munching at his food; he is not the least concerned at the grand feast. No wonder, you say, for he is only a dumb beast, to whom nothing better than oats and hay can be given. And so it is. But are you not surprised that so many men who are endowed with reason, should live in such stupid insensibility? Faith teaches us that there is an eternal kingdom of heaven, in which infinite goods have their abode; God Himself invites us hither to an everlasting feast of divine joys: "And they set at naught the desirable land;"⁴ the most of them remain at their corn and hay. One is concerned about some temporal gain; another about the breath of honor; another hankers after sensual pleasures; each one thinks of what he likes best; the joys of heaven that are promised them, if they only remain true to God for a short time, find no place, no inclination, no desire in their hearts; "they set at naught the desirable land." Ah, is it possible! Can then a momen-

Folly of men in having so little desire for heaven. Shown by a simile.

¹ *Gaudium vestrum nemo tollet a vobis.*—John xvi. 22.

² *Si dicerem : promisit aurum ; gauderes.*

³ *Promisit seipsum, et tristis es.*

⁴ *Et pro nibilo habuerunt terram desiderabilem.*—Ps. cv. 24.

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tary, brutish lust, a vain, perishable beauty, a handful of worldly goods, so captivate and enslave our minds, that for their sake we often choose eternal pains with the demons in hell, pains that we are assured we shall not escape, if we do not withdraw our hearts from the things of earth, and turn to God? And is that great heaven not able to persuade us for its sake to spend a few uncertain years in the sweet labor of the service of God? O heaven! thou hast filled the forests and deserts with solitaries, monasteries and convents with religious! Even great lords and tender virgins thou hast moved to practise the utmost poverty, unceasing prayer, and constant fasting and mortification. Thou hast so influenced many thousand martyrs that they thought nothing of the wounds inflicted on them, of the fire and sword and terrible torments they had to endure. And if we were to ask them the reason of all this, they would answer with St. Paul: Ah, we have done nothing. All we have suffered during life bears no comparison with the happiness we now enjoy in heaven. "For I reckon that the sufferings of this time are not worthy to be compared with the glory to come, that shall be revealed in us."¹ And thou, that same heaven that art now actually awaiting us, canst not so far draw our hearts to thee, that for a time we should be willing to serve God, who for His own sake alone deserves all our love? All of us, no matter who we are, must necessarily strive for happiness in all our actions; thou, O heaven, dost promise us a most perfect happiness, a most pure happiness, an infinite, immortal, eternal happiness; and we take no notice; we neglect and despise thee! What folly! what monstrous insensibility! Is it possible that a reasoning being can so far forget himself?

Sorrow for this folly, and resolution to aspire only to heaven.

Ah yes, my God! I have been so stupid, and I must now be ashamed of and at the same time bewail my folly! How few thoughts I have sent up to heaven during the day! How often for the sake of pleasing some creature, satisfying my sensuality, snatching a brief pleasure, have I forfeited this heaven forever! Nay, I have thought myself fortunate in thus losing heavenly happiness! Foolish mortal, where were your wits, your reason? Where is your common sense gone, if you do not now turn away from earth, and fix your heart altogether on heaven? Away then with all the trumpery that the world can give me! I am

¹ Existimo enim, quod non sunt condignæ passiones hujus temporis ad futuram gloriam, quæ revelabitur in nobis. — Rom. viii. 18.

born for higher things; I am heir to an eternal kingdom; all that is less than divine glory, all that is less than God, is not worthy of my immortal soul! Heaven alone is the end and aim that can delight my heart; thither shall tend all my sighs, my desires, my wishes; to heaven will I direct my thoughts, words, actions, and all my works. If things go well with me in this world, yet shall I rejoice especially in the thought of the place where it shall be well with me forever. If I must here suffer misfortune, loss of honor or worldly goods, I shall be comforted by the thought of suffering no loss in heaven. If I have here to contend with hard work, troubles, crosses, want; then heaven shall be my comforter, where it shall be all the better with me on account of my sufferings here. If the suggestions of the hellish foe, the flatteries of creatures, the desires of the flesh try to lead me into sin, the thought of heaven shall defend me from their attacks; it will spur me on to do violence to myself in order to overcome temptation. If I am inclined to sloth in the divine service, or to grow tired of it, heaven shall urge me on to zeal, devotion, and the constant love of God. Let the earth give me what it may, it cannot give me heaven; let the earth take from me what it may, it cannot deprive me of heaven. Away with you then, O world! Come, O heaven! Oh, would that we all were there! Amen.

TWENTY-THIRD SERMON.

ON THE LOVE OF CHRIST TOWARDS THE WORLD IN SENDING
THE HOLY GHOST.

Subject.

1. Christ has so loved the world, that He gave it His Holy Spirit after He had ascended into heaven. A wonderful instance of most true love! 2. Christ has so loved the world, in spite of having been so ill-treated by it. An incomprehensible love! —*Preached on Whitsunday.*

Text.

Sic Deus dilexit mundum, ut Filium suum unigenitum daret.
—John iii. 16.

“God so loved the world as to give His only-begotten Son.”

Introduction.

Great, unheard-of is the love of the Eternal Father for us men in giving His only-begotten Son for the redemption of the world! But still greater and more wonderful to my mind is the love shown us on this day of Pentecost, when to our great astonishment we may change the words of my text and say: "God so loved the world as to give His Holy Spirit." For, who has so loved, my dear brethren? The incarnate God, Jesus Christ. Before His ascension into heaven He had promised the Holy Ghost: "If I go, I will send Him to you."¹ And when did He send Him? After He had ascended into heaven and sat on the right hand of His Father. What did He love so much? "God so loved the world." When? At what time? After He had been crucified by it. All these circumstances, when I consider them attentively, make that love seem incomprehensible to me. I will now represent it to you in two points, in order to increase our love for such a good God.

Plan of Discourse.

Christ has so loved the world that He gave it His divine Spirit after His ascent into heaven. A wonderful instance of most true love! The first point. Christ has so loved the world, in spite of having been so ill-treated by it. An incomprehensible love! The second part.

Holy Ghost, inflame our hearts with Thy divine fire, that we may always have a constant love with our whole hearts for Him who has loved us so truly and wonderfully! Obtain this grace from the Holy Ghost for us, O divine Mother, and ye holy angels!

True love is rarely found among men on earth.

The greater in the world the number of those who profess to be true friends and lovers, the more seldom are true, faithful, and constant friends to be found; so that not without reason does the Wise Man compare a true friend to a costly treasure for which a hundred seek with great labor and trouble, but of the hundred only one finds: "He that hath found him, hath found a treasure."² And shortly before he says that there are friends whose affection lasts only for a time, but ceases when trials and sorrow come: "For there is a friend for his own occasion, and he will not abide in the day of thy trouble."³ There are friends whom

¹ Si abiero. mittam eum ad vos.—John xvi. 7.

² Qui autem invenit illum, invenit thesaurum.—Ecclus. vi. 14.

³ Est enim amicus secundum tempus suum, et non permanebit in die tribulationis.—Ibid. 8.

the least word can turn from you, and convert into enemies: "There is a friend that turneth to enmity."¹ There are friends who, when seated at your table, show great affection for you, but whose affection vanishes with their hunger: "There is a friend, a companion at the table, and he will not abide in the day of distress."² There are many who testify to their friendship with the lips, but who are very chary of proving it by deeds; many promise most politely their services, help, and patronage, and almost force their kindnesses on you; but when it comes to the scratch they shrug their shoulders and turn away from you. Nothing is more common in the world nowadays than to despise as a simple fool one who is apt to trust to such expressions of friendship.

That falsehood, treachery, and inconstancy in human love and friendship are made most evident when a change of fortune intervenes, and one friend is lowered much below or exalted much above the other. Then he who holds the higher position hardly deigns to cast a glance at the other, and avoids his company, like the swallows that abandon the house which they see about to fall, although they had before a comfortable nest in it. And this because he either fears lest it should be suspected that he too formerly belonged to a similar lowly station, or lest his former friend should make untimely calls on him for assistance. So did the poor Job complain of the friends who looked on at his sufferings from a distance: "Now you are come, and now seeing my affliction you are afraid."³ What were they afraid of? Perhaps lest they too should be affected with the same malady? No, answers de Lyra; they were afraid he might ask them to help him in his misery.⁴ As long as the butler of King Pharaoh lay in prison with Joseph, there were no better friends to be found, as we read in the Book of Genesis; but how quickly things altered with them! Hardly had the former been released from prison, and restored to his office, than he forgot altogether his old friend and companion. Joseph had humbly and earnestly besought him: "Only remember me when it shall be well with thee, and do me this kindness to put Pharaoh in mind to take me out of this prison."⁵ But the butler allowed two whole years

He who is raised to a high position knows his friend no more.

¹ Est amicus qui convertitur ad inimicitiam.—Eccius. vi. 9.

² Est amicus socius mensæ, et non permanebit in die necessitatis.—Ibid. 10.

³ Nunc venistis, et modo videntes plagam meam timetis.—Job vi. 21.

⁴ Timebant ne aliquid pro sublevatione sua repeteret ab eis.

⁵ Tantum memento mei cum bene tibi fuerit, et facias mecum misericordiam, ut suggeras Pharaoni ut educat me de isto carcere.—Gen. xl. 14.

to elapse without even thinking of Joseph: "But the chief butler, when things prospered with him, forgot his interpreter."¹ So goes the world. True indeed is the saying: Honors change manners.² Yet that is not as it should be: "He that is a friend loveth at all times,"³ says the Wise Man; in all places and circumstances, even though he is exalted to a throne, he does not forget his friend. If you have found a friend of that kind you may esteem yourself fortunate. Keep in with him, for his fidelity is not to be bought with gold or silver, as the Wise Man again says: "Nothing can be compared to a faithful friend, and no weight of gold and silver is able to countervail the goodness of his fidelity."⁴ O Christians, why do you seek in vain on earth for such a constant, true, and loving friend?

Christ proves Himself a true and constant Friend, for during His life on earth He loved poor and lowly people.

Lift up your eyes to heaven; there you will find Him. See how Jesus Christ, seated on the right hand of the Eternal Father, still thinks of us poor desolate mortals in this prison of misery. The love in His heart has not grown cold; that love which He showed from the first moment of His Incarnation; nay, it is as it were increased since He has attained the summit of His glory and honor; for He redoubles His former benefits with greater and better ones, and instead of the humanity by which He was visible to our mortal eyes, He has sent His living, divine Spirit down among us, to take up His eternal dwelling with us, if we only wish. It is true that while the divine Son remained on earth clothed in our flesh He was always surrounded by the lowliest and poorest in the eyes of the world. A poor virgin was His Mother, a poor workman His foster-father, poor, ignorant, lowly fishermen His disciples and companions; the poor, the sick, the blind, the lame, lepers, and such people were those who followed Him everywhere. If any believed in His teaching and doctrine it was the common people, as we read in the gospel, and as we see to be the case in our own times. "A great multitude heard Him gladly."⁵ "But of the people many believed in Him."⁶ See, these were the people whom the Lord chose as His friends and companions; to them He showed His

¹ Et tamen succedentibus prosperis, præpositus pincernarum oblitus est interpretis sui.—Gen. xl. 23.

² Honores mutant mores.

³ Omni tempore diligit qui amicus est.—Prov. xvii. 17.

⁴ Amico fideli nulla est comparatio, et non est digna ponderatio auri et argenti contra bonitatem fidei illius.—Ecclesi. vi. 15.

⁵ Multa turba eum libenter audivit.—Mark xii. 37.

⁶ De turba autem multi crediderunt in eum.—John vii. 31.

generosity and beneficence; these were they whom He loved during His life, and even to the very end of it: "Having loved His own, who were in the world, He loved them unto the end."¹

Wonderful that such a great God should deign to live on terms of friendship with poor mortals, and to receive them with such love and kindness! Yet I can understand this somewhat better when I consider the state in which the Lord chose to live on earth. A great prince when he travels incognito, as they say, in a foreign land, is treated differently to what he should be if he were in his own palace seated on his throne in majesty. In the latter case he is surrounded by nobles who wait on him most humbly and respectfully; in the other case he mixes unknown with the common people; lowly workmen, peasants, beggars, servants may approach him and treat him as their equal; nor is anyone surprised at this, even of those who know his rank and dignity. Kings and emperors have often gone about in this manner, disguising themselves with a mask, or with mean garments, so that they might converse freely with people of lowly station, and laugh and enjoy themselves unconstrained with those who would be afraid to approach them if they appeared with the insignia of their rank. So methinks it was with the great Son of God, as I picture Him to myself living on earth among us men. He concealed and hid His Godhead, and took the appearance of a poor, lowly servant, as the Apostle writing to the Philippians describes Him: "He emptied Himself taking the form of a servant, being made in the likeness of men, and in habit found as a man."² His neighbors and fellow-citizens had no other name for Him but that of the carpenter's Son: "Is not this the carpenter's Son?"³ One who has to work for his daily bread? Therefore it is not so much to be wondered at that He nourished such great love and friendship for the poor and lowly whom He seemed to resemble in all things.

And chose for Himself a lowly state.

But what am I now to say or think? The same Lord now in His glory, in His palace, in the possession of all His majesty; the same humanity, which, drawn out of its poor and miserable condition, is exalted to be the Head of all principalities, as the Apostle says: "Who is the head of all principality and power;"⁴ whom God has so exalted that at His name every knee must bend:

But now He is exalted in glory.

¹ Cum dilexisset suos qui erant in mundo, in finem dilexit eos.—John xlii. 1.

² Semetipsum exinanivit, formam servi accipiens, in similitudinem hominum factus, et habitu inventus ut homo.—Philipp. ii. 7.

³ Nonne hic est fabri Filius?—Matt. xlii. 55.

⁴ Qui est caput omnis principatus et potestatis.—Coloss. ii. 10.

“God hath exalted Him . . . that in the name of Jesus every knee should bow of those that are in heaven, on earth, and under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that the Lord Jesus Christ is in the glory of God the Father;”¹ the same Man whom all the angels met at His triumphal entry while they cried out as with one voice: “Lift up your gates, O ye princes, and be ye lifted up O eternal gates; and the King of glory shall enter in;”² the same Man to whom, as to the Father and the Holy Ghost shall be eternally sung the praises due only to the sovereign God: Holy, holy is the Lord God; the heavens and the earth are full of the majesty of Thy glory.

Yet He still loves us poor mortals, and sends us a most costly Present, the Holy Ghost.

This Lord, I say, in His unimaginable splendour and happiness cannot yet forget the world, nor put out of His heart the poor, desolate members He left behind here; for He desires as formerly to maintain a bond of love and friendship with them. He is like the lover who, when obliged to leave the object of his affections, is yet present with her in heart by constant recollection, nay, he is always sending her costly presents and gifts to nourish and maintain their mutual affection. So also Christ when He left the world to enter His kingdom, and could no longer remain in visible shape among men on earth, sends us, utterly regardless of His supreme dignity, His own divine heart and the Substance of His eternal life, as St. Thomas of Aquin calls the Holy Ghost,³ to show that we still hold a place in His heart, and to keep alive the flame of mutual love and friendship.

In spite of having done enough to prove His love by giving us Himself in the Blessed Sacrament.

But, O dear Lord, hadst Thou not already done enough for this end, when Thou didst leave us Thyself with Thy living Godhead and manhood, Thy flesh and blood in the Blessed Sacrament? For as often as we wish we can go into a church and hold a friendly conversation with Thee, make known to Thee our wants and miseries, nay, enjoy Thee in the holy Communion as our food and drink? Was not that, I ask again, more than enough to prove the greatness of Thy love for us, and to make us Thy friends? Yes, my dear brethren, it was a great deal too much for us poor mortals; we could never have dared to imagine, desire, or hope for such a gift. But it is not enough for the love of Christ for

¹ Deus exaltavit illum . . . ut in nomine Jesu omne genu flectatur cœlestium, terrestrium et infernorum, et omnis lingua confiteatur quia Dominus Jesus Christus in gloria est Dei Patris. — Philipp. ii. 9-11.

² Attollite portas, principes, vestras, et elevamini portæ æternales, et introibit rex gloriæ. — Ps. xxiii. 7.

³ Cor et amor Patris ad Filium, et Filii in Patrem.

us; He foresaw that the most of us would go to communion not more than once or twice in the year, and that thus He could not always remain present in our hearts; so that He has given us the Holy Ghost along with all those other proofs of His love, the Holy Ghost, the Substance and Essence of love to remain always in our hearts by sanctifying grace, and never to leave us until we drive Him violently away by committing mortal sin.

Oh, He is indeed a true, constant under all circumstances, and most wonderfully loving Friend! "So God loved the world!" Ah, would that we always truly reciprocated His love! But alas! how do we act? In the Book of Judges I read of a remarkable thing that occurred to a man of high standing named Michas. He happened to meet with a stranger who was travelling through the country seeking for a livelihood; Michas was pleased with the man's appearance. "Stay with me," said he to him, "and be unto me a father and a priest;"¹ I will place you in my temple over all my silver idols; you shall have every year food, clothing, and money as your wages. In a word he kept the stranger with himself. "He was unto him as one of his sons," says the Scripture; "and Michas filled his hand."² Could Michas have done more for his dearest friend to win his love and fidelity? But hear the sequel. It happened that some soldiers of the tribe of Dan were roaming about the country, and they resolved to plunder the temple. When the priest heard the noise they made, he rushed out at once and asked them: "What are you doing?" Do you wish to rob my master's temple? I cannot permit that! "Hold thy peace," said the soldiers to him; "put thy finger on thy mouth, and come with us, that we may have thee for a father and a priest."³ We will give you more than you receive from your present master, and you shall be placed over all the temples of our tribe. Only be silent. Who would have thought it? Hardly had he heard the offer, when the ungrateful man, attracted by the promises made him, not only held his tongue, which was all the soldiers asked him to do, but was the first to stretch forth his hand to plunder; and carrying off idols, incense, censers, and other silver vessels, went with the soldiers. Michas called after him in a loud voice: O my friend, have I deserved to be so treated by you? Do you thus abandon and rob me? Come back! But his calling

An example showing our unfaithfulness and inconstancy to Christ.

¹ *Mane apud me et esto mihi parens ac sacerdos.*—Judges xvii. 10.

² *Fuitque illi quasi unus de filiis; implevitque Michas manum ejus.*—Ibid. 11, 12.

³ *Quid facitis? Tace; pone digitum super os tuum; venique nobiscum, ut habeamus te patrem ac sacerdotem.*—Ibid. xviii. 18, 19.

was all in vain; the ungrateful man did not return. Such is the friendship of the world; we go over to the side of him who promises and gives the most: ¹ like the gnats and flies that fall in greatest numbers on that part of the table where the most sweet things are scattered about.

We sell His
friendship
for
wretched
things.

Do we not often act thus with our God, my dear brethren? From no one have we received more gifts and benefits; from no one have we more to hope for, than from Him; and yet how little is required to make us violate our fidelity to Him and completely abandon Him! A little money, a trifling gain, a sweet pleasure that we enjoy only in thought, a man whom we wish to please, a false friend who flatters us, the respect for some human being who places a piece of gold or silver on our lips saying: be still, when we should speak in the defence of justice; such things and even less is enough to drive God out of our thoughts and out of our hearts, and to make us renounce forever our love and friendship for Him. Nay, what is still more shameful, the more our good Lord has overwhelmed us with benefits, the more does love for Him grow cold in our hearts. Many a one served his God faithfully in want and in a state of poverty and lowliness, who when blessed by the Almighty and raised to a better condition, gives up his devotion and turns traitor to God. Such is often the case, and experience shows that God is served better by poor and lowly people, than by those whom He has filled with good things; as if these latter were ashamed of being devout, and especially of appearing at divine service in public; as if God were too lowly for them, now that He has raised them above others. I must break off here, because my thoughts are turned to another subject of wonderment, which I now proceed to explain in the

Second Part.

Christ sends
the Holy
Ghost as a
Present to
the world.

“So God loved the world” that He gave it His own divine Spirit. What world? That ungrateful world in and by which He was crucified. Truly an incomprehensible love! Let us consider it for a while. When princes and kings are entertained at a foreign court according to their rank and dignity, they are wont either to leave rich gifts behind them, or else on their return home to send an ambassador back with costly presents as a mark of their gratitude for the honor shown them. So too, it seems to me, my dear brethren, has Our Lord wished to act to the world.

¹ Plus offerenti.

The three and thirty years had elapsed which this great King of heaven had spent among us men on earth; and during the time He was as it were in a foreign land, as He Himself said to Pilate: "My kingdom is not of this world." ¹ The time came for Him to take His departure from the world; and how did He act? The four Evangelists tell us: on the evening before He left the world He took the bread and the chalice, divided them amongst the apostles, and said: there you have My flesh and blood. These were His gifts, than which the world has nothing more precious; these He left as a memento of His long stay with us, and they are to be with us till the last day. But this munificence did not satisfy Him, nor set bounds to His generosity. As soon as He came to His royal residence and took His place on the throne of His glory He sent down to the same world the most costly present that heaven contained, namely the third Person of the Godhead, the Holy Ghost Himself. To what end, O Lord, and why didst Thou do so? Wert Thou then so well treated on earth? Wert Thou received honorably and treated in a manner becoming Thy dignity? Are we men perhaps the cause of Thy being raised to such great glory in heaven? And if we were, even then Thou couldst not do more to show Thy gratitude than Thou hast done for us already.

But, ah, the shame of it! hardly was Thy arrival known in the world, when it closed its gates and doors in Thy face; for Thee, O Lord, it had not even a hut or barn, or a corner under a stair-case, which is not refused to any beggar-child, and is granted even to cats and dogs; not even the slightest shelter had it for Thee to be born in. In a cave in the open field, in a ruined stable exposed to wind and weather Thou wert forced to seek for refuge, so that Thou hadst good reason to complain as Thou didst: "The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air nests: but the Son of man hath not where to lay His head." ² Even this cave seemed to the world too good for Thee; and it drove Thee therefrom by violence, so that Thou wert forced to fly into Egypt among idolaters in the dark night. Such was the first greeting Thou didst receive from the world! But perhaps in time it came to know Thee better and treat Thee more courteously? Alas, Thy experience was indeed a sad one! How often did not men at

Although the world had treated Him so shamefully.

¹ *Regnum meum non est de hoc mundo.*—John xviii. 36.

² *Vulpes foveas habent, et volucres cœli nidos; Filius autem hominis non habet ubi caput reclinet.*—Matt. viii. 20.

tempt Thy life! How often did they not try to throw Thee down from the top of a mountain, to stone Thee to death, as if the world could not rest until it had made away with Thee! These were the attentions paid Thee during Thy life. A seditious man, a betrayer of the people, a glutton and drunkard, a thief and robber, a fool and simpleton, a wizard and dealer in the black art; these were the compliments paid, the titles of honor given Thee. Ropes and cords, rods and scourges, spittle and filth, thorns and nails, the cross and the gibbet are the marks of honor with which it leads Thee in triumph and at last brings Thee to the shameful death of the cross, and thrusts Thee forth with mockery and derision to get rid of Thee. Is it this treatment that has moved Thee to give us such a proof of love, so that Thou feelest Thyself compelled as it were out of gratitude to send us such a costly gift?

And thus
deserved
punishment
instead of
kindness.

Ah, far different was the treatment deserved by the world, and good reason had it to feel Thy anger. Thou dost not act towards it as Thy heavenly Father acted in the parable described in the Gospel of St. Mark: the householder who had hired his vineyard to certain people, as the gospel tells us, sent his servant to them at harvest time to gather in his crop; but they beat the servant and sent him away empty-handed. And again he sent another, and him they killed; and many others of whom some they beat and others they killed. Therefore having yet one son most dear to him, he also sent him unto them last of all, saying: they will reverence my son. But the husbandmen said one to another: This is the heir; come let us kill him, and the inheritance shall be ours. And laying hold on him, they killed him, and cast him out of the vineyard. "What, therefore," asks Our Lord, "will the Lord of the vineyard do?" At last his patience shall be turned to wrath. "He will come and destroy those husbandmen," and ruin them completely. My dear brethren, there you have a sketch of what passes between God and men. He has lent to us the earth with all it contains for our use: "Thou hast set him over the works of Thy hands."¹ says David; "Thou hast subjected all things under his feet, all sheep and oxen, moreover, the beasts also of the field, the birds of the air, and the fishes of the sea:"² under the condition that we obey Thy law and pay Thee with constant love as The interest on the loan. And what has not

¹ Constituit eum super opera manuum tuarum.—Ps. viii. 7.

² Omnia subjecti sub pedibus ejus, oves et boves universas, insuper et pecora campi, volucres cœli, et pisces maris.—Ibid. 8, 9.

the Lord done from the beginning to obtain this love and obedience from men? Almost continually He sent them His servants and prophets to reprove their vices and urge them to serve God as they ought. How were those servants treated? They were ridiculed, scourged, driven from one town to another, stoned, beaten to death, killed with clubs and axes, sawn asunder while still alive, as we read in the history of the ancient prophets, and as Christ Himself complained to the Jews: "Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them that are sent to thee, how often would I have gathered together thy children, as the hen doth gather her chickens under her wings, and thou wouldst not!"¹ And at last the heavenly Father sent His own beloved Son down on earth: "God so loved the world, as to give His only-begotten Son," who personally by His teaching and example should urge men to do good. But it was all to no purpose; even this divine Son, as we learn from the gospel, was so cruelly treated, that He lost the appearance of a man, and had to die on the gibbet of the cross. Heavenly Father! behold how miserably Thy Son is treated before He leaves the earth to come to Thee! The wounds in His hands, heart, and feet are perpetual mementoes of the cruelty practised on Him by men on earth; and not only the Jews who crucified Him are to blame for it, but we too who by our sins have been the cause of His death! Just God! where is Thy wrath and vengeance? Hast Thou no waters any longer to submerge the sinful world as Thou didst before? Hast Thou no fire or sulphur to burn it up like Sodom and Gomorrah? Hast Thou no lightning or thunderbolts to destroy it utterly?

Ah, what am I saying? Why do I call down vengeance from heaven, which must fall on my own head first of all? Why should I try to arouse the anger of God, when I am most especially in need of His mercy? I acknowledge that the world after its shameful treatment of Our Lord, deserved nothing better than punishment; but the good God, whose mercy has neither limit nor end, is pleased to deal far more graciously and lovingly with men. He did indeed send down fire from heaven when His crucified Son ascended thither; but it was a fire of love which descended on the apostles on this day: "And there appeared

And yet He shows such love for it.

¹ Jerusalem, Jerusalem, quæ occidit prophetas, et lapidas eos quibus te missi sunt, quoties volui congregare filios tuos, quemadmodum gallina congregat pullos suos sub alas, et non habisti!—Matt. xxiii. 37.

to them parted tongues as it were of fire.”¹ Truly He has sent down abundant waters on earth, but it is that water of life of which the Prophet Ezechiel says: “And I will pour upon you clean water, and you shall be cleansed from all your filthiness. . . and I will give you a new heart, and put a new spirit within you.”² It was from that water that the apostles during these days seemed to the Jewish people drunk as if from wine. Truly He has caused His thunders to be heard: “Suddenly there came a sound from heaven, as of a mighty wind coming,”³ as we read in to-day’s Epistle; but that mighty thunder-clap was destined to awaken men to the zealous service of God. Even the wounds that the Son of God, when entering into His glory, brought with Him and showed to His eternal Father, only served to appease the divine anger against the wicked, ungrateful world, and to move God to bestow further benefits on it. The same wounds serve the divine Son as a book in which He has written down us mortals that He may never forget us; and they urged Him, and brought Him so far, that after He had given Himself wholly to us, He sent us also the third Person of the Blessed Trinity, the Holy Ghost.

An incomprehensible love on the part of Christ, which cannot be more beneficent.

Finally, this is the love, which, when I fully consider all the circumstances referred to, I cannot comprehend; it carries away my thoughts captive, and leaves me nothing to do but to wonder. “God so loved the world.” The great God so loved the world, that treated Him so ill! David, thou holy servant of God! thou didst find it hard long ago to understand the condescension of such a God to a lowly creature, in even thinking of him and visiting him: “What is man that Thou art mindful of him? or the son of man that Thou visitest him?”⁴ In what consist this remembrance and visitation? “Thou hast subjected all things under his feet, all sheep and oxen, moreover the beasts also of the field, the birds of the air, and the fishes of the sea.” Therefore didst thou cry out in admiration: “O Lord, Our Lord, how admirable is Thy name in all the earth!”⁵ What wouldst thou have said and thought, hadst thou seen the great God, so to speak, pour Himself out and give Himself to men after having suffered

¹ Et apparuerunt illis dispertitæ linguæ, tanquam ignis.—Acts ii. 3.

² Effundam super vos aquam mundam, et mundabimini ab omnibus inquinamentis vestris. . . et dabo vobis cor novum, et spiritum novum ponam in medio vestri.—Ezech. xxxiii. 25, 26.

³ Factus est repente de cælo sonus, tanquam advenientis spiritus vehementis.—Acts ii. 2.

⁴ Quid est homo quod memor es ejus? aut filius hominis quoniam visitas eum?—Ps. viii. 5.

⁵ Domine, Dominus noster, quam admirabile est nomen tuum in universa terra!—Ibid. 10.

so cruelly at their hands, as we now know to be the case? Christians! "God so loved the world." Have we ever pondered duly on this? Tell me, what more can we desire or expect from Him? What can the Almighty still give to man to show His love? The earth with all its goods He has left to him for his use and benefit; heaven and all its joys He has prepared for man as a reward if we only wish to accept it; the angels He has set at his side as his protectors and guides. He Himself with His whole divine essence, as St. Bernard says, has placed Himself at our disposal. The eternal Father has given Himself to us as our Father; the eternal Son has exhausted Himself for our redemption, and is daily our food and drink; the eternal Spirit has now given Himself to our souls, so that the whole Blessed Trinity has as it were been exhausted in our service. "O love, love!" cries out St. Bernard; "all that He could He did for us; all that He had He has given us!"¹ He who gives everything he has, even if it is only a farthing, can give no more; so that, as St. Augustine says, "God, although He is almighty, could not give more; although He is infinitely wise, He knew not how to give more; although He is infinitely rich, He had no more to give."²

What dost thou now think, O my soul, of this marvel of love? Dost thou believe it, or not? If thou dost not believe, then I am not surprised that thou art still so cold in making a return for that love. But thou art a Christian and holdest all this as an undoubted truth? How then is it possible that thou art not more zealous and earnest in loving One who has such a love for thee? As it is, it were better for thee to have thy heart turned into stone, for then one could not expect love from it. How is it possible that thou shouldst willingly and knowingly offend such a Lover? And alas, that is done every day and every hour by us men! For by every sin we condemn the law of the eternal Father before His eyes, we trample under foot the blood of God the Son, we destroy the temple of the Holy Ghost, disturb Him, and drive Him violently out of our hearts. Ye wild beasts, avoid man as a monster of ingratitude, for if you had a little reason you would be ashamed of him! Ah, my Lord and my God, I first of all must be ashamed of the monstrous ingratitude I have shown Thee in thought, word, and deed. Thou didst not owe me anything, and hast given me all; I am always in Thy debt, and Thou hast hard-

Exhortation
and resolu-
tion to love
Christ with
all our
hearts, and
constantly.

¹ O *charitas, charitas, omnia quæ potuit, pro nobis fecit omnia quæ habuit, dedit.*

² *Deus cum sit omnipotens, plus dare non potuit; cum sit sapientissimus, plus dare nec-
civit; cum sit ditissimus, plus dare non habuit.*

ly received anything from me by way of payment! Thou art not in want of me, and yet dost give Thyself wholly to me to be altogether mine; there is nothing more necessary to me than Thou art, and yet I have almost always been against Thee by my tepid life. Take me now, I beseech Thee! In future I desire to live only for Thee and Thy service; to love nothing but Thee alone; and as Thou art willing to be wholly mine, so will I by Thy help and grace, and by constant zealous love be and remain wholly Thine till death and in eternity. Amen.

TWENTY-FOURTH SERMON.

ON THE LOVE OF CHRIST IN THE BLESSED SACRAMENT
OF THE ALTAR.

Subject.

Wonderful is the patience of Christ in the Blessed Sacrament; therefore wonderful the love of Christ for men in the Blessed Sacrament.—*Preached on the feast of Corpus Christi.*

Text.

Cum dilexisset suos, qui erant in mundo, in finem dilexit eos.
—John xiii. 1.

“Having loved His own, who were in the world, He loved them unto the end.”

Introduction.

In these words the beloved disciple begins his description of how Jesus in the Last Supper before His death, instituted the Blessed Sacrament, and left us Himself as our food and drink: “Having loved His own, who were in the world, He loved them unto the end.” That is, He loved them without measure, limit, or comparison. The greatness of this love I have spoken of on another occasion, and have shown from it that He has given us Himself wholly and without exception in this mystery; and at the same time I proved that for our greater benefit and comfort, He has hidden Himself from our weak eyes under the appearance of bread, that we may approach Him with more confidence, and deal with Him more familiarly. Now there is another consideration which presents itself to my mind, and it is one most

worthy of admiration, and makes the love of Christ for us men incomparably greater; and that is, the patience He shows in bearing with so much in this sacrament, only that He may serve as a Help and Consolation to pious souls, as I shall now prove.

Plan of Discourse.

Wonderful is the patience of Christ in the Blessed Sacrament; wonderful therefore His love for men as shown in this most holy sacrament.

Such shall be the whole subject of this discourse, to the honor and glory of the God who loves us so much, and as a spur to our devotion and love for such a good God. This grace we expect from Him through the intercession of Mary and of the holy angels.

Of all the signs of true and honest love, there is none more certain than patience. To wish to be in each other's company, to see and speak with each other and entertain a mutual intimacy is the property of those who love; yet sometimes hypocrites and flatterers do this for the sake of the advantage they hope to reap from it. To give many gifts and presents, to offer and render services is the property of those who love; yet the same is done sometimes among men out of motives of worldly craft, or through assumed courtesy in order to receive something better in return, but not through sincere affection. But to please another without hope of reward or profit, and willingly to endure trouble and trials is a thing to which one could not easily bring himself, unless he were induced to do it through a sincere love. What unwearied patience the mother has with her little child? For a whole day she carries it in her arms or on her lap; she wakes more than she sleeps during the night in order to quiet the little one, and many other inconveniences she readily submits to. Why so? Would she do that for a strange beggar child, who is nothing whatever to her? No, she would think it a grievous burden. But in the case of her own child she hardly seems to feel the trouble; she laughs and sings in the midst of it. Why? Because she loves her child. Whence comes the patience of a hero in the battlefield? He must expect to suffer hunger, thirst, heat, cold, and discomfort, and moreover to be in constant danger of his life; he must run into the midst of fire and swords, receive wounds, and shed blood. If such deeds were

Patience is
a proof of
love.

necessary, such endurance required to gain heaven, many a one would run away at once. But as it is, the hero finds pleasure and honor in all this. Why? Because he loves to make a great name for himself. And the same is to be said of all who give themselves much trouble in worldly affairs; it is the love of something or other that makes every difficulty seem light to them. "Charity is patient," says the Apostle, "beareth all things, endureth all things."¹ And indeed I am not sure that I can depend much on our love and devotion to God when things go according to our natural wishes; it is trial that proves true friendship; it is by patience in adversity that we know true love. The greater the love, the more willing the patience; the greater the suffering and the difficulty that we endure to help others, and the greater our patience and joy in enduring it, the more clearly do we prove the warmth of our affection.

In this sacrament Christ shows the greatest patience.

If that is so, my dear brethren, what idea or picture can we make to ourselves of the love of Jesus Christ for us men in the Blessed Sacrament? Away, now, with all the patient love and friendship that we could expect from men! We might find one here and there, who for the sake of others, and when there is no special difficulty in the way, would lend the help of his intercession, or spend his time and money and labor; and indeed he who does that, does much. But can you find anyone in the world, who for the sake of another, and that a perfect stranger from whom he can expect no advantage, exposes to public scorn and derision his rest and ease, his honor and good name, his life and body? O my God, how much more wonderfully Thou knowest how to love, than men! Truly has the Spouse called Thee "Chosen out of thousands."² Yet she has said far too little; chosen and selected, should she rather have called Thee, out of all who ever were or shall be in the world. Indeed, my dear brethren, if I were not otherwise convinced that Jesus loves us most intensely; if the history of His bitter passion did not bring before my eyes the chains and bands, the blows and buffets, the spittle and filth, the torn garment and the fool's cloak, the scourges and thorns, the nails and lance, the mockeries and blasphemies that He bore for us with most amazing patience; if the frequent sight of the cross did not remind me constantly of the painful and disgraceful death He suffered for us, then would

¹ *Charitas patiens est, omnia suffert, omnia sustinet.*—I. Cor. xiii. 4, 7.

² *Electus ex millibus.*—Cant. v. 10.

the patience He shows in this sacrament be of itself enough to convince and persuade me, and make me exclaim with the Prophet David: "What is man, that Thou art mindful of him?"¹ In truth Thou hast loved us to the end, and beyond all measure!

For it re-
news His
death mor-
ally.

For I need say nothing of His perpetual death, as it were, which is daily, hourly, and every moment renewed in a special manner in the Blessed Sacrament, in which He offers Himself to the eternal Father as a Victim for the brethren and children He has left behind, and in which His whole body, although living in its substance and essence, as theologians teach, is confined within the smallest particle of the appearances of bread and wine, so that not a member of that body is in a condition to perform any of its proper acts, neither hand, nor finger, nor tongue, nor any other member can be moved or used, and His body lies as if dead under the sacramental species, and cannot walk, stand, hear, see, speak, feel, nor be felt; again Christ, whenever a new particle is consecrated, receives a new sacramental life, and as often as Holy Communion is received, that is, hundreds, thousands of times in the day, loses this life and as it were dies (these are mysteries, my dear brethren, that far surpass our understanding; but our faith is sufficient for us to believe them), and St. Paul writing to the Corinthians assures us of this: "As often as you shall eat this bread and drink the chalice; you shall show the death of the Lord until He come."² all this, I say, I shall now pass over.

What great patience, humiliation, condescension, nay, I might say degradation, it is for such a great Lord and God, to be bound on all sides, to have nothing to say for Himself, to be obedient to the will and sign of a poor mortal, and to be present at once whenever a priest, even if the priest be a wicked man or excommunicated or degraded, utters the sacred words of consecration over the bread and wine with the proper intention—to be present where and whenever He is told, on the altar, in the house, in the open country. For, like a helpless little child wrapped in swaddling-clothes He allows Himself to be kept and placed where men wish. He permits Himself to be brought into the straw-thatched cabin, into the poor hospital, into a mean and filthy dwelling; wherever in fact He is wanted. How often does it not happen when Holy Communion is being distributed, and

He therein
humbles
and lowers
Himself ex-
ceedingly.

¹ Quid est homo, quod memor es ejus?—Ps. viii. 5.

² Quotiescumque enim manducabitis panem hunc et calicem bibetis, mortem Domini annuntiabitis donec veniat.—I. Cor. xi. 26.

indeed it can hardly be otherwise, that small, nearly invisible particles fall from the host on the clothes of the communicants or on the cloth, and are afterwards mixed with the dust or trampled under foot? How often either through lapse of time or carelessness are not the particles in the tabernacle eaten by worms? A great degradation, I say, a wonderful patience for such a great Lord to exhibit before whom the angels tremble.

For He is exposed to gross insults from unbelievers and heretics.

But all this seems small to the excessive love He bears us; He is quite satisfied with it, because it is for our good. Only consider the grievous outrages Our Lord has endured in the Blessed Sacrament, those He still daily endures, and those He must endure till the end of the world, even from the very persons for whose sake He instituted the Blessed Eucharist, and to whom He gave Himself as their food, namely from men. In the very beginning some of His disciples were scandalized and disgusted at the idea of it. When He made known to them His last will in the words "The bread that I will give is My flesh,"¹ they were horrified and, as the gospel says, many of them left Him, and would not be seen with Him any longer: "After this many of His disciples went back, and walked no more with Him."² There was a forecast of what He would afterwards have to endure from infidels, heathens, Jews, Turks, heretics. An incredible and yet a true thing. Is not Christ on the altar treated by many nowadays as if He were still in the hands of the executioners on Mount Calvary? What cruel blasphemies, mockeries, and insults are hurled at Him by heretics in word and writing; for they ridicule Him, deride and dishonor Him as a simple, blind, and ridiculous God of bread; such are the blasphemous expressions they use.

Shown by examples.

How often and how dreadfully have not the sacred chalices and monstrances been desecrated, even while they still contained the sacred hosts? The vandals emptied them and trod them under foot; the Donatists gave the sacred species to cats and dogs, as Optatus writes. How often have not the Jews pierced them with knives and forks, until they miraculously shed blood, scorched and burnt them with fire, cooked them like broth in boiling water, hung them up in the chimney to be smoked, buried them in cesspools, and that with such scorn and contempt, that one shudders to think of it! How often have not the Iconoclasts,

¹ Panis quem ego dabo caro mea est.—John vi. 52.

² Ex hoc multi discipulorum ejus abierunt retro, et jam non cum illo ambulabant.—Ibid. 67.

the heretical soldiers in time of war torn down, destroyed, and burnt the churches and temples, and with them the altars and tabernacles in which the Blessed Sacrament was kept? And what shall I say of the witches and sorcerers who so often desecrated the body and blood of Christ in their unhallowed rites, carried them to their sabbaths, and there offered them to the goat, that is, the devil! Books are written about those horrid profanations which are enough to make even the foul fiend himself shrink back in dread; much less am I able to think of them without a shudder. O gracious Saviour! Thou didst cry out on the cross like a triumphant hero: It is consummated. Now I have withstood all My pains; there is an end to My sufferings! Yes, that is true; the sufferings were ended which Thy heavenly Father had decreed for Thee during Thy mortal life; but there is not yet an end to the torment which the shameless malice of man, as far as it can, tries to inflict on Thee; and it is almost more terrible and cruel than what Thou hadst formerly to suffer; for that Thou didst voluntarily take on Thyself for our redemption. And Thou art patient under all this, O great God!

Didst Thou perhaps not foresee it all; didst Thou think that at the sight of such a striking proof of love as Thou gavest men in this holy sacrament, Thou wouldst always be received and treated with all possible honor and reverence, as is due to Thee? Nay, if such be the case, I believe that, since Thou dost now find Thyself so deceived, Thou wouldst say, as once did Thy heavenly Father in His indignation: "It repenteth Me that I have made them."¹ I am sorry that I have instituted this mystery; and at once Thou wouldst take from the priests the power Thou hast given them. But who dares doubt that any part of futurity is concealed from Thee? Truly, my dear brethren, He who knew that one of His disciples would betray Him: "For He knew who he was that would betray Him,"² knew also all the insults that men would offer Him in His most holy sacrament. But this did not deter Him from His purpose. He acted in this matter, so to speak, not otherwise than that celebrated hero of Troyes, who after his native city was destroyed by the enemy, fought his way out through fire and sword, full of blood and wounds, but as soon as he found that he had left his wife behind, came at once to the resolution of encountering the same dangers again in order to

And all this
He foresaw.

¹ *Pœnitet me fecisse eos.*—Gen. vi. 7.

² *Sciebat enim, quisnam esset, qui traderet eum.*—John xiii. 11.

free one whom he loved. In the same way Our Saviour after having received many wounds and suffered a cruel martyrdom could not make up His mind to abandon the world, and His love for men brought Him so far, that He made use of wonderful means to remain with them; although He knew well that the wicked ingratitude of those very men in abusing this most holy sacrament would renew and multiply manifold all the injuries He formerly suffered. In spite of all He made the resolution: "I will not leave you orphans;"¹ no, be it with Me as it may, I cannot abandon you, but will remain with you till the end of the world: "Behold I am with you all days, even to the consummation of the world."²

He has to endure insult even from Catholics.

Who are then those beloved children for whose sake Jesus has been pleased thus to remain on earth? They are the Catholic faithful who receive Him in the holy Communion. The Catholic faithful! Oh, now indeed, O Lord, do I wonder at Thy love and patience! Thou hast done this for the Catholic faithful. Do they deserve such great love? Are they not the very people of whom many, nay, the greater number, although enlightened by the faith and believing firmly in Thy presence, instead of the reverence and gratitude they owe Thee, instead of doing their very best to further Thy honor and glory, yet often do more than the Jews and heretics to arouse Thee to anger and to dishonor Thee? Are there not Catholic Christians who come into Thy churches indecently clad, whose manners and behavior seem to show that their purpose is to laugh at and mock the God who has emptied Himself for their sake? whose laughing and jesting, talking and chatting seem to indicate that they believe Thee to be hidden behind the wall, so that Thou canst not see them? Are there not Catholic Christians who hardly bend the knee to Thee, although for a mere mortal they will bend their bodies almost to the ground, as if Thou wert too lowly for them to notice? Are there not Catholic Christians who leave Thee alone on the altar for whole weeks and months, and never think of paying Thee a visit and adoring Thee, although in other places their visits are constant? Are there not Catholic Christians who, in time of sickness and when they are dangerously ill, are ashamed to have Thee brought to their houses, as if it were a disgrace to receive the King of heaven as a visitor? Who are ashamed, when Thou art

¹ Non relinquam vos orphanos.—John xiv. 18.

² Ecce ego vobiscum sum omnibus diebus, usque ad consummationem sæculi.—Matt. xxviii. 20.

carried to the sick, to accompany Thee publicly in the street, although kings and emperors have thought it an honor to go with Thee in that way, and if an earthly prince were passing by they would not hesitate to escort him even on foot in spite of wind and weather? Are there not Catholic Christians who allow a half or even a whole year to pass without approaching Thy Table, or else they do it in such a tepid and cold manner and with such little preparation, that after having received Thee, they are just the same as if they had partaken of the most ordinary corporal food? Are there not Catholic Christians who touch and mangle Thy sacred body on the altar with hands defiled with impurity? Are there not Catholic Christians who go to communion on the principal feast days of the year, and although in many of them Thou dost find a pure, chaste, and zealous heart to dwell in, how many are there who like Judas sink Thee in a cesspool of vice through want of an earnest sorrow for sin and a firm resolution to avoid the proximate occasion?

Oh, what an insult to the Blessed Sacrament! Take the sacred host and put it into a sink of filth, and it will be treated with less dishonor, and Our Lord would rather remain there than in the heart of one who is in mortal sin. And are these the people who have moved Thee to give such an extraordinary proof of Thy love? It is in some respects tolerable, and not so much to be wondered at, that heretics and Jews and heathens, who see in this mystery nothing more than a piece of bread, should dishonor and despise it as idolatrous; for it is the same as if they ill-treated a prince who comes to them unknown in the disguise of a peasant. But if they knew by an infallible faith, as we do, that God is really present under the appearance of ordinary food they would exclaim: oh, how great is the good fortune of Catholic Christians, and what a good God is theirs! But if they saw that the same God, so well known and so worthy of love, is so little honored and loved by Catholic Christians, so shamefully despised and insulted by them, must not even the very barbarians say that those Christians are not worthy of such a great benefit? All this Our Lord knew well that He would have to put up with; and yet He has not allowed His love for us to be balked.

And the
worst in-
sults.

Just souls, what think you of all this? It is for you after all that God has taken on Himself such an amount of dishonor, insult, mockery, and ridicule. For the small number of pious Catholics who receive Him worthily, and that He may remain with

All this He
bears for
the sake of
those who

receive Him
worthily.

them and be on friendly terms with them, and that they may find in Him a constant protection against all the enemies of their souls, a comforter in their sorrows, a refuge in trouble and adversity, a teacher in difficulty and doubt, a food and refreshment in sickness, a friend in life, a viaticum in death, a sure pledge of eternal salvation—for their sake, I say, He has all this time with the utmost patience borne, is bearing still, and will bear to the end of time, the countless contradictions, insults, mockeries, and blasphemies of an immense number of heathens, Turks, Jews, heretics, unworthy priests and wicked Christians in this holy sacrament.

An incom-
prehensible
love.

O love, who can understand thee? Indeed, O Lord, I have never doubted for a moment of Thy presence as God and man in this wonderful sacrament, and with Thy help I am ready to give my life, to shed my blood for this truth founded on Thy word (would that I were worthy of such a great happiness!); but permit me to say that if a doubt could arise in my mind about this mystery, then it would be founded on nothing else but the excessive love Thou dost show us therein. Tell me any one: how can bread become flesh by the mere virtue of the words spoken over it, while the appearances of bread still remain? How can a human body be in different places at the same time? How can it be enclosed living and in all its entirety in the smallest place imaginable? How is that possible? Oh, I answer, in all this there is no difficulty; I can understand easily how it can be, when I only remember that God is Almighty, and to Him nothing is impossible. But if I am asked how is it possible that God so loves a poor creature from whom He has nothing good to hope for, nothing evil to fear, how it is that He has given Himself to that mortal as food and drink, and that too to the disadvantage of His own honor and with the resolution to endure so many insults; then to speak the truth I know not what to answer, except that it is a mystery that surpasses all understanding, and all I can do is to admire, love, praise, and bless the God who loves in such a wonderful manner.

It is but
right then
for us to
love Him
in return.

“Know you what I have done to you?”¹ asked Our Lord of His disciples after having instituted this sacrament. And the same question He now asks all of us. What answer shall we make? Ah, dear Lord, if we had received no other benefit from Thee, but this; if Thou hadst given us no other proof of Thy

¹ *Scitis quid fecerim vobis?—John xiii. 12.*

love, Thou wouldst have yet done more than we could have desired, more than we could understand, more, so to speak, than is becoming Thy majesty. What return shall we make Thee? Shall we join that ungrateful rabble who by their irreverence in church, their tepidity and coldness in Thy love, their shame to show Thee public honor, their negligence in visiting and receiving Thee, and by the sinful consciences with which they approach Thy holy Table overwhelm Thee with insults and give Thee new material to practise patience? Shall we not rather, filled with gratitude for such a great benefit, for such wonderful love, endeavor to restore the honor that so many deprive Thee of, and to make reparation to Thee by frequently visiting and receiving Thee with all possible devotion and reverence; by resignedly bearing the daily trials we have to contend with, and by serving Thee zealously and loving Thee constantly, atone for the injuries that Thou art pleased to suffer for our sake? Can the unheard-of and undeserved love Thou hast shown us not move us to do this? And yet (oh, more astonishing than the mystery itself!) hitherto my heart has remained insensible! How often have I not sided with Thy enemies; how seldom with Thy true children who love Thee sincerely! With reason mayest Thou complain: "I have brought up children and exalted them: but they have despised Me."¹ It is a miracle, cries out William of Paris; but a devilish miracle! Man is surrounded by the goodness of God; God is every day kindling a new fire to inflame our hearts; and yet in spite of the great heat those hearts remain cold!

Forgive me, O Lord, for having been so long cold and tepid in Thy service, so negligent in honoring this wonderful sacrament of Thy love! In future as often as I shall find myself in Thy presence, whether before Thy altar in the church, or in the street in public processions, or when Thou art carried to the sick, I will accompany Thee and adore Thee with all the respect due to such a great Lord under the humble species. Let others, if they wish, call me a hypocrite, a scrupulous person, a devotee; let them laugh at me if they will; what is all that compared to the insults Thou hast to bear for my sake in this holy sacrament! If I love Thee as I ought, then I should esteem it an honor and a joy to suffer a little for Thee; and if I am so thankless as to be wanting in love to Thee, then I deserve, and richly too, all the shame, disgrace, and punishment that the world can inflict

Resolution
in future to
love and be
devout to
Christ in
this sacra-
ment.

¹ Filios enutrii et exaltavi; ipsi autem spreverunt me.—Is. 1. 2.

on me. Whenever in my daily trials I feel inclined to be impatient, I will remember with shame for myself the wonderful patience that Thou, great God, who art not in the least need of me, showest for my sake in this holy mystery. And when I approach Thy sacred Table, which shall in future occur oftener than hitherto, I shall use all possible devotion and diligence to prepare my soul, so that Thou wilt not have cause to repent having given me that food. And whenever and however it shall be possible for me, I shall try to further Thy honor and glory, and so love constantly above all things, Thee my God, who hast as it were loved me above all that is Thine. Amen.

Another Introduction to the same sermon for the second Sunday after Pentecost.

Text.

Homo quidam fecit cœnam magnam.—Luke xiv. 16.
 “A certain man made a great supper.”

Introduction.

It must indeed have filled that man with indignation to see that after having prepared such a splendid supper, thinking thereby to give pleasure to his friends, almost all the invited guests “began all at once to make excuse.”¹ But he made a good use of the food he had prepared, by giving it to the poor and needy.

My dear brethren, by this parable Christ wished to describe, partly the invitation given to men to the celestial feast in eternal life; partly the invitation given them to partake of the heavenly supper of the Blessed Sacrament in this life. Both invitations are disregarded by the greater number of men. God has invited us all without exception to the heavenly feast; for according to the words of the Apostle, He wishes all men to be saved; and yet only the smaller number of men shall partake of this banquet. “Few are chosen,” as the eternal Truth has said; because the great majority of men do not live as they ought, nor strive to enter by the narrow way that leads to heaven. They whose hearts are attached to earthly goods, say, if not in words, at least by their actions, “hold me excused;”² I have other things to attend to in the world; I cannot come. Those whose hearts are held captive by the sensual and unlawful love of crea-

¹ *Cœperunt simul omnes excusare.*—Luke xiv. 18.

² *Habe me excusatum.*—*Ibid.*

tures also say: "hold me excused;" I have my treasure here; I cannot come; and thus most people go on the broad road to destruction. To the banquet of the Blessed Eucharist, of which alone I mean now to speak, as this is the Octave of Corpus Christi, Christ invites all Catholic Christians, and wishes them to approach it often for the good of their souls; but again the greater number seem to have a disgust for this heavenly food; they receive it so seldom and are so ill-prepared for it. Has not our good Lord, who means so well with us, great reason for feeling highly indignant? Meanwhile, although He has foreseen how things would be in this respect, He has not omitted to prepare His heavenly Table, and He will keep it prepared to the end of time, that at least He may be a comfort and support to the few pious, humble souls who receive Him worthily. Shall I call this great patience or great love on the part of our Saviour? It is great patience; but at the same time an exceeding great love. But it is not enough to say merely that He has left this holy sacrament to the world, although so many despise it; for there are many other circumstances connected with it, which show the great patience of Our Lord in bearing with many insults and injuries; a patience that proves most strikingly His great love for pious souls. As I shall now explain. *Plan of Discourse as above.*

ON THE LIFE OF MARY THE MOST BLESSED MOTHER OF GOD.

TWENTY-FIFTH SERMON.

ON FAITH IN THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION OF MARY.

Subject.

The want of a certain faith in the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary seems nowadays to be hardly consistent with a true and devout love for the Mother of God.—*Preached on the feast of the Immaculate Conception.*

Text.

Conceptionem Virginis Mariæ celebremus.—(From the Matins of the Feast.)

“Let us celebrate the conception of the Virgin Mary.”

Introduction.

* That the ever-blessed Virgin Mary never sinned in Adam, but was conceived immaculate and without any stain of original sin, is not a dogma of faith, and every one is allowed to doubt it, nay, to contradict it without thereby incurring the guilt of heresy. Pardon me, ye zealous lovers of Mary! It seems to me I see the blood already mantling in your cheeks at the idea of my saying such a thing on this day of your beloved Mother; as if I too belonged to the number of those who doubt her immaculate conception! And your anger is just; your indignation righteous; for to tell the truth, if I heard another speaking in the same way, I could not prevent myself from giving undoubted signs of anger. But restrain now your pious indignation; for I mean to deal honestly with you. O Mary! most holy Virgin, thou knowest my heart and its feelings towards thee! I repeat then: it is indeed not defined in express words by the Catholic Church as a dogma of faith that Mary the Mother

* NOTE.—It is unnecessary to remind the reader that this sermon was written long before the definition of the dogma of the Immaculate Conception.—*Translator.*

er of God was conceived without sin, nor of him who refuses to believe it, might one say with truth the words of Our Lord in the Gospel of St. Mark: "He that believeth not, shall be condemned,"¹ and be excluded as a heretic from the Church militant on earth as well as from the Church triumphant in heaven. No, such is indeed not the case; yet I fail to understand how he can really love the Mother of God, who in these days of ours does not believe, but doubts the truth of her immaculate conception. I say again:

Plan of Discourse.

Not to believe this for certain, although it is not yet formally defined by the Church as an article of faith, seems hardly reconcilable nowadays with a true and devout love for the Mother of God. This is what I intend to explain and prove in this sermon, and my whole argument is based on this: To be able with good reason to praise and speak well of another, and not to do so, but rather to speak in a way derogatory to his honor, is a sign of a very weak affection and love towards that person. Now that Mary should be conceived without any stain of original sin, is a most honorable thing for her; while the contrary is a shame and disgrace. The former we have just reason for asserting and believing, so that he who asserts the contrary gives proof of having very little love and affection for Mary, or even none at all. All philosophers must approve of this style of argument, if the premises are rightly proved. I do not select this subject because I have a doubt concerning any one of you in this matter, my dear brethren; for I look on you all as true children of Mary. My sole object is to impress more deeply on our hearts and minds the faith in her immaculate conception, that we may have in our minds a greater esteem for the ever-blessed Virgin, and in our hearts an ever-increasing love for her. If I succeed in this, we shall derive ample fruit from this sermon; yet the moral lesson shall not be wanting.

Grant me, O sovereign Mother, Immaculate Virgin, grant me, the poorest and least of thy servants, to speak something to thy praise! Happy me if I could only be the occasion of increasing love and esteem for thee even in one soul! Grant me to-day, O dearest Mother, this grace and favor. Nay, I comfort myself with the hope that thy generosity will give me still more.

¹ Qui vero non crediderit, condemnabitur.—Mark xvi. 16.

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Help me to speak, ye holy angels; what I have to say concerns the honor of your Queen.

The lover is not apt to believe anything bad or dishonorable of the person he loves.

If we love another, we think of him only what is good, great, and worthy of praise; and we are always ready to speak well of him. Moreover, it gives us a secret pleasure, and makes our heart bound with joy when we hear others speak favorably of him. Origen says that "one makes a god of him whom he loves in an especial manner."¹ On the other hand, if we hear him spoken of unfavorably, we feel ill at ease, and unhappy; we try in every manner possible to hide his faults; nay, as St. Jerome says, "we interpret even the faults of our friend in a good sense."² His very failings appear praiseworthy to us; his vices seem to have something virtuous in them. I ask all who love truly to tell me if this is not the case? Hence it often happens that many, captivated by love, are unable to see any faults in the object of their affections, and even look on deformity as beauty; thus it is that parents blinded by love, cannot and will not imagine anything of their children but what is good. Sometimes a neighbor comes in, and with the best intentions warns a mother to look better after her children, and to be more strict in punishing them; but to no purpose. No, exclaims the mother, my child is not so bad; he is good and dutiful; I know him better than you do; look after your own affairs. In a word, love overlooks everything; conceals faults, makes straight what is crooked, and finds nothing easier than to form a good opinion of the beloved one. On the other hand, if there is one whom you cannot bear, towards whom you feel an aversion, oh, then little indeed is required to make you think ill of him. If only a whisper is directed against his good name, you are at once ready to support it, although you may otherwise know very little of the matter. Hence as love makes us form a good opinion of another, so to refuse to think well of him, although we have reason enough to admire him, is a sure sign of very little love and affection on our part, or indeed of none at all. I do not think it necessary to dwell farther on this argument.

Conception in original sin would have been very dishonorable to Mary.

And from it I draw this conclusion to prove my subject: if we truly and with all our hearts love Mary, then without hesitation and at once we should be ready to believe that she was conceived, not in original sin, but immaculate, if we had the slight-

¹ Unusquisque, quod præ cæteris colit, hoc et Deus est.

² Amicus prava quoque recta judicat.—S. Hieron. Ep. 61. ad Tammach.

est proof, nay, only a mere suspicion and imagination in support of our belief. For, how great the honor she would be deprived of, how great the ignominy attached to her good fame, if she were only for a moment in the state of original sin! To make this clearer to you, my dear brethren, let us consider the misery and wretchedness of the soul defiled and laden with this sin. Recall to mind everything you know of in the world that is horrible, everything disgusting that you have seen or read of. Even then you will have no idea of what a monster sin is in the soul. For all natural abortions, no matter how horrible they may appear to us, how terrible and intolerable to our senses, are in the eyes of God neither bad nor disgraceful, and they are deliberately created by the Author of all good, who cannot create anything evil. It is sin alone that has inherited nothing good from God, and it makes the soul an enemy of God, a horror to the angels, a monster unworthy of a place on earth, an abomination even to senseless creatures if they could see it, a slave of the devil, and so deformed, that if it could see itself it would run away from itself as if unable to bear its own hideousness.

When the holy Fathers try to describe the state of the soul before baptism they cannot find words to depict its fearful condition, its filth and its misery; the most horrible of all seems to them the fact that it is hated and rejected by the God of infinite goodness. Ask St. Augustine what is the state of such a soul, and he will tell you that it is a "victim of the divine anger."¹ Ask St. Chrysostom, and he will tell you that it is a "sacrifice of wrath."² St. Paul speaks still more emphatically, and wishing to describe truly the condition of such a soul, he says that it is "by nature a child of wrath."³ St. Gregory of Nyssa, explaining these words, thus addresses the Almighty God: It is true, O God! that Thou art an inexhaustible Fountain of mercy and goodness, and an Abyss of love: yet we must confess that, on account of sin, which we inherit from our first parents, Thou hast just reason to be angry with us; and not only hast Thou cause for anger, but with justice dost Thou hate and persecute us; and as we are an abomination in Thy sight, Thou must indeed behold us with aversion.⁴ There you have the three movements of the

For her soul in the state of sin would have been an aversion and horror to God.

¹ Iræ victima.

² Sacrificium indignationis.

³ Natura filii iræ.—Eph. ii. 3.

⁴ Revera Domine tu fons bonitatis, tu fons amoris, juste tamen aversatus es nos; juste tamen persecutus es nos; juste tamen execratus es nos.

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mind which the Almighty God experiences towards such a soul. Man before being washed in the laver of baptism is in the sight of God an object of aversion, horror, and abomination; so that if he dies in that state the God of infinite goodness must cast him off forever. Truly the children of Adam are unhappy, since they bring such a shameful inheritance with them into this world, and still more unhappy are sinners, who by their own malice increase and intensify their misery! And it was this sad and amazing reflection that forced from Job the sorrowful words in which he regrets having been born, and curses the day of his birth: "Let the day perish wherein I was born; and the night in which it was said: A Man-child is conceived." Why so? "Because it shut not up the doors of the womb that bore me, nor took away evils from my eyes."¹ Because I have been conceived in sin; because in the very first moment of my life I was vicious, a sinner, an object of the divine hatred and anger.

That would have been a shame for the Mother of God.

See, my dear brethren, you who love the Mother of God, such is the shameful and unhappy state attributed to her! A slave of the devil, a child of wrath, of vengeance, of malediction, of cursing, must she be "of whom was born Jesus."² Jesus the supreme God! Do you believe this? Can any one who loves the Blessed Virgin imagine such a thing? O Mary, my dearest Mother, is it true that thou wert ever in that condition? Alas, if so, how I pity thee! What a shameful stain it is on thy glory! Now may men say of thee what they will; thy honor is lamentably disgraced! It is true, and undeniably true, as the Church sings of thee in the words of the royal Prophet David: "Glorious things are said of thee,"³ O holy Mother of God, O great Lady and admirable Virgin! Truly, O Mary! great things, glorious things have been said of thee in all times; but, pardon me for what I am about to say, if it be true that thou art not conceived without sin, then all the praise, no matter how great it may be, ever given thee by the holy Scriptures, the holy Fathers, the universal Catholic Church, is not by any means a perfect praise, but is and remains always wanting; there is a shadow on it that can never be blotted out for eternity.

Shown by a simile.

It is with thee, allow me to use a simile, but not by any means a comparison, as with the famous Alexander who stained and sul-

¹ *Pereat dies in qua natus sum, et nox in qua dictum est: Conceptus est homo! Quia non conclusit ostia ventris qui portavit me, nec abstulit mala ab oculis meis.*—Job iii. 8, 10.

² *De qua natus est Jesus*!—Matt. i. 16.

³ *Gloriosa dicta sunt de te.*—Ps. lxxxvi. 8.

lied all his heroic exploits by the crime he committed in cruelly slaying the celebrated Philosopher Callisthenes, who had dared to reprove him for his vices. When Seneca the Roman moralist heard of this, he broke out into the following exclamation: "This crime of Alexander's is eternal, and no valor or fortune in war can blot it out!"¹ no matter how great his victories may be, the stain of that crime shall always remain on his name. For whenever men may say of him: Alexander has conquered his enemies; they can also say: and he has killed Callisthenes. As often as they will say: Alexander has conquered Darius, the mightiest monarch of Persia; they can add: and he has killed Callisthenes. When histories will tell of him that he carried his victorious arms to the very seashore, and subdued the sea itself by his numerous fleets; they can add too that he killed Callisthenes. "And although he has surpassed the famous deeds of the great captains and generals of antiquity, none of his exploits shall be so great as the crime he committed in slaying Callisthenes."² Thus far Seneca.

And I too say: great and glorious things are said of the holy Mother of God: yet, O Mary, if we were to praise thee still more, and indeed there is no end to thy praise even to this day, yet all this glory is stained and lessened by original sin, if the guilt of it has ever been on thy soul. It is an eternal stain, that no virtue nor excellence can wash out. We may call thee: always a virgin; but at the same time we must sigh forth that once thou wert in the clutches of the devil. We may extol thee as the most chaste Mother, but we may add that at one time thou wert defiled with the filth of sin. We may call thee with the angel: full of grace; yet we must add that at one time thou wert in disgrace; the Lord is with thee, but once He was against thee; thou art blessed amongst women, but at one time thou wert subject like all other women to the curse, and wert not in the Book of Life. If with the woman in the gospel we congratulate thy Son that thou didst bring Him forth: "Blessed is the womb that bore Thee;"³ yet must we at the same time lament that thy soul was once possessed by that accursed sin! Finally, if we call thee the Mother of God, the greatest praise we can give thee; still have

All the praise given her would be lessened by this one stain.

¹ Hoc est Alexandri crimen æternum, quod nulla virtus, nulla bellorum felicitas redimet.—Seneca L. 6, quæst. nature, c. 23.

² Omnia licet antiqua ducum regumque exempla transferit, nihil tam magnum erit, quam æcelus Callisthenis.

³ Beatus venter qui te portavit.—Luke xi. 27.

we to acknowledge that thou wert once a child of reprobation and malediction, in a word, that thou wert conceived in original sin. And how could we then with truth say of thee: "Thou art all fair, O my love, and there is not a spot in thee:"¹ since thou wert once not very unlike the hideous demons themselves on account of original sin? And how could we understand the symbols we find referring to thee in Holy Writ? Thou art called "the lily among thorns;"² how could that be, if thou wert once thyself a thorn? How couldst thou be "a garden enclosed,"³ in which the evil spirits never found an entrance? How couldst thou be "a fountain sealed up,"⁴ into which the hellish serpent had never infused his poison? How couldst thou be "an unspotted mirror,"⁵ if thou wert once defiled by sin? Or "a vessel of honor," if thou wert once a vessel of guilt and filth? And you, O holy angels, how could you honor as your Queen, one who was once subjected to the yoke of Lucifer, whom you thrust out of heaven and hurled into hell? Truly, O Mary, that would be for thee an eternal stain, an undying dishonor that no subsequent praise or glory could obliterate.

Hence he who loves Mary must believe her conceived without sin, even if he has but one reason for his belief.

Can I then imagine such a thing of thee? Can any one who loves thee believe it, if self-evident truth does not compel him and fully convince him? I repeat what I said in the beginning: if the Catholic Church does not compel me by an express definition to believe that Mary was conceived in sin, I will never believe it, as long as there is even the smallest reason for a suspicion that the contrary is true, and the Church does not forbid me to attach credence to that reason; for I and every true lover of Mary must maintain that she was conceived without the least stain of original sin.

But there are countless reasons to make it humanly certain.

But I and with me all true lovers of Mary, have cause to be filled with consolation and joy of heart; for it is not a mere suspicion that supports our belief, nor is there only one of the holy Fathers who teaches it, nor is the belief confined to one place or country. There are so many evident proofs from the holy Scriptures, from the apostles, the Popes, and General Councils of the Church, that it is no longer a merely reasonable and well-grounded truth that Mary was conceived immaculate; but to speak hu-

¹ *Tota pulchra es, amica mea, et macula non est in te.*—Cant. iv. 7.

² *Lilium inter spinas.*—Ibid. ii. 2.

³ *Hortus conclusus.*—Ibid. iv. 12.

⁴ *Fons signatus.*—Ibid.

⁵ *Speculum sine macula.*—Wis. vii. 26.

manly of the matter: it appears to be a most certain, undoubted, and infallible truth, and nothing is wanted to confirm it but the authoritative declaration of the Church making it a dogma of faith.

It has been believed for such a long time in all parts of the world from west to east; it has been the belief of so many saints, of so many thousands of pious souls, of universities and schools, of whole countries and kingdoms. Nay, the great bulk of Christians, in spite of diversities of opinion on other matters, have always been united in defending and proclaiming the Immaculate Conception of Mary. Nay, they have bound themselves on oath to shed the last drop of their blood in defence of it. "Thou art all fair," they say and sing and shout out, until the whole Church rings with the joyful sound; thou art all fair, and there never was and never will be any spot in thee!

Such is the consent of many in all places.

Thus in the times of the apostles, St. James the Lesser praised her in his Liturgy, when he called her immaculate and faultless in every respect.¹ St. Matthew, as quoted by Francis de Sousa, who found the passage in a very old volume in a library at Valladolid in Spain, thus addresses Mary: "O blessed Mary, thou wert not conceived in sin!"² The holy apostle St. Thomas says: "Thou wert not condemned with all others on account of the sin of Adam foreseen by God."³ St. Matthew, as we read in the *Polyanthea Mariana* of Marinecius, speaks as follows: "O immaculate Mary! the Holy Ghost has protected thee from eternity."⁴

The testimony of the apostles.

My dear brethren, if I can bring forward so many testimonies from the apostles, how many might I not adduce from the holy Fathers of the Church, who preached and defended the Immaculate Conception of Mary as an undoubted truth? The whole day would not suffice for me to bring forward all the magnificent testimonies they supply in defence of this truth. Read, if you wish, St. Jerome, St. Cyprian, St. Anselm; SS. Bonaventure, Bernardine, Dominic, Lawrence, Justinian, Peter Damian, John Damascene, Gregory the Thaumaturg, Ephrem, the ancient Origen, Theodoret, Euthemius, and countless other doctors, who all declare positively that Mary was always an immaculate virgin, never stained with any sin, but exempted from the common lot

Of the holy Fathers.

¹ Immaculatam et omnibus modis irreprehensibilem.

² O beata Maria, non fuisti concepta in peccato!

³ In præviso peccato Adami non fuisti cum aliis damnata.

⁴ O Maria immaculata, Spiritus Sanctus ab æterno te præservavit.

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and from the inheritance of original sin. Let St. Augustine speak for the others, that great saint, who in his treatise on Nature and Grace, that he wrote against the Pelagians, who denied original sin, says that we are all conceived in it, and adds these words: "except the Blessed Virgin Mary, of whom on account of the honor due to God," whose mother she is, "I do not at all wish to speak when there is any question of sin."¹ Let our opponents now, if there be any such, keep silence. St. Augustine and the whole army of the Fathers stand up for Mary, and do not wish to hear her name mentioned in connection with sin, since she brought forth Him who is spotlessness and holiness itself. I say nothing of the many miracles that God wrought at different times to confirm the truth of the Immaculate Conception; for it is not my intention to-day to enter at large into the proofs of this truth, but only to show that we have good grounds for believing it.

The authority of the Church.

For if there never had been a miracle wrought in its favor, if the holy Fathers had never spoken of it, if there were not so many arguments at hand to support it; still I should be induced to hold it as an undoubted fact, considering that the Catholic Church does not forbid me to do so, and not only permits me to believe it, but even forbids each and every one publicly to teach the contrary, or to support their opinion with arguments; while at the same time she allows, encourages, and exhorts all to defend this belief so glorious to the Mother of God, and to instill it into the faithful from the pulpit. Moreover, the Church, Greek as well as Latin, wishes to have the Conception of Mary honored as a most holy conception, and has fixed a special feast day in honor of it. And according to the testimony of St. Thomas of Aquin, the Church never keeps a feast day unless in honor of some saint; and she urges the celebration of this feast on the faithful by granting all manner of spiritual privileges and indulgences, as we see by the Constitution of Pope Sixtus V. approved of by the Council of Trent; which Council also declared that when speaking of original sin, it was not at all its intention to include in its decree the Blessed Virgin. Now, what is the meaning of all this, if not that the Catholic Church certainly approves of and commands at least by signs, the belief in the Immaculate Conception?

¹ *Excepta sancta Virgine Maria, de qua propter honorem Dei, nullam prorsus, cum de peccatis agitur, habere volo questionem.*—S. Aug. de Nat. & Grat. c. 36.

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And should not that authority suffice to convince us of this truth? If St. Denis the Areopagite freely acknowledges that when he saw Mary, he would have adored her as God, if faith had not prevented him and taught him better; if, I say, faith alone kept Denis from adoring Mary, much more would he have with both mind and will embraced and defended the truth of her Immaculate Conception, which faith and the Church instead of contradicting, rather exhort all to uphold. And if any of the holy doctors of the Church in whose writings there seems to be a doubt of her Immaculate Conception, were to come amongst us now, and see the general unanimity of Christian people on this point, and how the feast of this mystery, which was not held in their time, is now so solemnly celebrated in all places; how would they not, I say, bow down in lowly reverence before this great mystery? And they would rejoice with all their hearts to find that they had made a mistake in this matter, that their doubts were unfounded, and that it is now allowed in the Church without any suspicion of error to acknowledge and praise the Immaculate Conception of Mary to her great glory.

In the face then of so many arguments, of so many testimonies of the apostles and doctors of the Church, and of the authority of the Church and the general belief of the faithful, shall I still obstinately refuse to believe and still persist in taking away this great honor from Mary? And shall I continue to hold the contrary opinion, simply because it is not condemned by the Church as a heretical error, and because perhaps there were formerly one or two who maintained it? Oh, if I did that (I am speaking for myself alone) I should not be worthy to see the light of day, nor to call myself, O Mary! thy child, and thee my Mother! If there be any other who still refuses to believe, I leave it to you, my dear brethren, to form what opinion of him you choose. I have shown already that he who has good grounds to speak well of another, and yet puts forward opinions contrary to his honor, proves clearly enough that he regards that other with very little love or affection. And I have shown too how derogatory it is to the honor and glory of the Blessed Virgin to say that she was ever in original sin, or ever infected with its poison. Now I leave it to yourselves to judge of the opinion you are to form of those who attribute such a disgrace to her, and when they have good reason for defending her honor, rather prefer to attack it. The conclusion is evident. At least as far as I am concerned,

This thought
to convince
any reason-
ing man.

And he who
doubts it,
does not
love Mary.

let him who still harbors a doubt about the Immaculate Conception of Mary tell me a thousand times, if he likes, that he loves her, and I would never believe him.

Resolution to acknowledge publicly the Immaculate Conception, and imitate it by a pure life.

Meanwhile, my dear brethren, “we celebrate the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary.” This we will honor as long as the breath of life remains in us, and honor with our whole heart, and proclaim it openly, and defend it if necessary with our life’s blood! What an honor for us, poor children of Adam, to have a mother who never was infected with the least stain of sin! What a comfort for us, poor sinners, to have as our sure refuge one who overcame all sin! What a joy for us mortals surrounded by many dangers, to have such a powerful protectress, namely the Immaculate and most pure Virgin, in all the temptations that assail us against the virtue of holy purity! But that we may not be friends of hers merely in word, nor honor her Conception only with the lips, let it be our firm resolve to follow the footsteps of this our immaculate and beloved Mother by a truly pure and chaste life. Let him who loves Mary say amen to this with me. So shall it be, O Mary! O Immaculate Virgin! with the help of the divine grace, which we beg of thee to obtain for us from thy divine Son by thy powerful intercession. Amen.

TWENTY-SIXTH SERMON.

ON THE TRUTH OF THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY.

Subject.

Never in her life did Mary acknowledge by word or sign that she was conceived in sin; therefore she was conceived immaculate.—*Preached on the feast of the Immaculate Conception.*

Text.

Macula non est in te.—Cant. iv. 7.
 “There is not a spot in thee.”

Introduction.

For the last seventeen hundred years since the birth of Christ many minds have been puzzled by the question whether Mary the Blessed Virgin was conceived in original sin like the other children of Adam. This has been a subject of earnest study to

saints, men enlightened by the supernatural light of the Holy Ghost, to universities with their hair-splitting acuteness of argument, to the commentators and interpreters of Holy Writ, to the Councils of the Church in their most accurate investigations; and yet no one has been able to say that he has found the least stain of sin in Mary. At all times and among all nations has this praise been uttered in her honor: "There is not a spot in thee;" nor was there ever one. All Catholics who are well inclined towards Mary believe this, swear it, preach it, defend it as an undoubted truth, with the tongue, the pen, and the sword: "There is no spot in thee." This is the cry uttered by all the churches, altars, and images in all Catholic towns that are built, consecrated, or painted in honor of Mary's Immaculate Conception: "There is no spot in thee." This is maintained by thirty-eight most renowned universities and academies that have united in their decision not to grant degrees to any one, unless he first swears to defend the Immaculate Conception at all times: "There is no spot in thee." This is the conviction of the most mighty kingdoms, provinces, and countries of Europe, and amongst them of this our own archdiocese of Treves, which have chosen as their patroness Mary conceived without sin: "There is no spot in thee." This is the cry of so many Popes who have approved of this opinion as a just and holy one, and exhorted preachers to proclaim it from the pulpit; forbidden under penalty of excommunication any one to contradict or discuss it in an adverse sense; commanded the feast of Mary Immaculate to be honored specially with an octave every year throughout the whole Church, and allowed all priests on Saturdays which are not hindered by another feast to say the Office and Mass of the Immaculate Conception. "There is no spot in thee." So that to maintain the contrary, against the general belief of the faithful, or not to believe this truth firmly, is at the very least a sign of little love and affection for Mary. But of this I will say no more to-day, my dear brethren. From Mary herself and her mode of life I now mean to draw another proof of this truth, so that her very silence shall prove that no stain was ever found in her. To establish my position I shall take only one argument furnished by Father Anthony Perez, one of the most acute theologians of his time in Spain; it is as follows, and is at the same time the

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Plan of Discourse.

Never during her life did Mary acknowledge by word or sign that she was conceived in sin; therefore she was conceived immaculate.

Most Blessed Virgin, all I now wish is that the glory of thy Immaculate Conception, well known as it is throughout the world, may shine all the brighter in the hearts of those that love thee. And what most fills me with joy, is that this glory comes from thee alone; therefore I proceed confiding in thy help and assistance. Angels of God and servants of Mary, you will surely not refuse me your wonted help in this matter, which is such a glorious one for your Queen!

It is a valid argument to say that as Mary has never acknowledged being conceived in sin, therefore she was conceived immaculate.

Singular style of argument, you will think, my dear brethren! Mary never acknowledged that she was conceived in sin; therefore she was conceived immaculate! Mary never said: I have sinned in Adam; therefore she was not stained with original sin! What sort of an argument is that? A very good one! What? But we do not read that she ever said or in any way gave others to understand that she is the Mother of God; is it therefore not true that she is the Mother of God? She never said that she was a pure virgin before, during, and after the birth of her divine Son; is she less a virgin on that account? Not by any means. How then can the former argument hold? For we are more ready to speak of what tends to our honor than of what is disgraceful to us. Who ever boasted of a mean, lowly descent? Every one would like to come of a noble family; and therefore he who knows that his descent is base, keeps silent about it so as not to prevent others from looking on him as well-born. Who would ever volunteer the information that he once stood under the gallows with the rope round his neck? that he was branded on the shoulder? that he has been a thief, a robber? Confessions of the kind are generally extorted only by means of long and cruel torture. Hence that Mary never said of herself (if it be true, although we believe the contrary): I was once a slave of the devil, an enemy of God, and deserved eternal death; I had the shameful brand of sin on my soul, or, what amounts to the same thing, I was conceived in sin; from that we may not conclude that she was conceived immaculate? Yes, we may; and I maintain that if the argument is not infallible, it is at all events a most certain one. Let us hear the reason.

I start with this undoubted truth, that the Mother of God, as after Christ Himself she was the greatest and most excellent of all God's creatures in natural and supernatural gifts, so that St. Chrysostom calls her "the most excellent of all the miracles wrought by the hand of God ;" so also after Christ did she possess amongst all created and enlightened souls the clearest knowledge and perception of all things concerning herself and all other creatures. For if St. Paul could say of himself with truth, "Now we have received not the spirit of this world, but the Spirit that is of God : that we may know the things that are given us from God,"¹ can we doubt that the great Mother of God had the same knowledge of herself? Especially when we take into consideration these words of St. Bernard : "What was granted only to a few mortals we must firmly believe was not withheld from the great Virgin Mary."² Truly she was well aware of the great things the Lord had done for her, as she herself says : "He that is mighty hath done great things to me."³ Truly she saw the wonderful beauty of her soul, the fulness and superabundance of the graces she received, the height of her glory and dignity ; she could have given better testimony of these things than the angels, who wondered when they beheld her, and not being able to comprehend her excellence, could only ask : "Who is she ?"⁴ Well did she understand the sayings of the prophets, the symbols and figures that referred to herself. "She had," says Origen, "the knowledge of the law, and understood by daily meditation the sayings of the prophets."⁵ That ark of the covenant held in such veneration by the Hebrews, the ladder reaching to heaven that Jacob saw in his dream, that enclosed garden of the spouse of the Canticles, that mighty cedar of Libanus, that burning and yet not consuming bush at which Moses wondered, that snow-white lily uninjured amidst the thorns: these and a hundred other symbols she knew of better than the prophets, as referring to herself and signifying her already in far distant antiquity. Therefore if it is true (and no true lover of Mary can doubt it, while for my part I am ready to

For, specially enlightened by God, she knew all the favors and graces she had received.

¹ *Miraculorum omnium maxime eximium.*

² *Nos autem non spiritum hujus mundi accepimus, sed Spiritum qui ex Deo est, ut sciamus quæ a Deo donata sunt nobis.—I. Cor. II. 12.*

³ *Quod vel paucis mortalium constat fuisse concessum, fas certe non est suspicari tantæ Virgini fuisse negatum.*

⁴ *Fecit mihi magna qui potens est.—Luke 1. 49.*

⁵ *Quæ est ista?—Cant. III. 6.*

⁶ *Habebat quippe legis scientiam, et prophetarum vaticinia quotidiana meditatione cognoverat.*

join with all my heart with those who are willing to shed their blood in defence of its truth)—if it is true that the Blessed Virgin was exempt from the common lot of the children of Adam and was conceived without original sin, then she knew and was well aware of that fact, and could not have said the contrary of herself without violating the truth. But if it be not true, so let us suppose for the moment, or if the Blessed Virgin knew not of the privilege granted her, then she could only have looked on herself as like the other children of Adam, conceived in sin; and so she could have acknowledged that much of herself. Is not such the case, my dear brethren?

But she was also the most humble of creatures, and never spoke of those favors.

The second basis of my argument is this truth: as amongst all mere creatures that God has made, there is none more worthy and excellent than Mary, so none has been or ever will be as humble as she. “No creature in the world was ever found to be the equal of the Blessed Virgin in humility,”¹ says St. Guaricus. Nay, says St. Bernard, to say the Virgin Mary, or the humble one, is the same thing;² the words are different, but in her case the things signified are the same. But why do I bring forward the holy Fathers as witnesses to this? Her whole life from the third year of her age, when she consecrated herself to the service of her Maker in the temple, even to her latest breath, what else was it but a constant exercise of humility, modesty, self-abasement? She tried to hide from the world all her great and ennobling gifts; she sought out most eagerly every occasion of appearing lowly and unworthy of notice. Never, as the Abbot Rupert well remarks, did she reveal to a single human being, not even to her dearest friends and nearest relatives, the singular favors she received from God.

Not even to St. Joseph did she mention the Incarnation.

This is evident from the fact that when she was bearing Our Lord in her womb, she never said a word of it to St. Joseph, and kept silent even at the risk of being put to shame before the world, and stoned to death. A most wonderful thing that I have often meditated on, but could never understand! Reflect on it for a moment, my dear brethren, and consider the humility shown herein by Mary. Joseph, knowing of her pregnancy, but not of the mystery of the Incarnation, was sorely disturbed and troubled in mind; and knew not what to think, or what to do. Should he denounce her as an adulteress, as was the custom according to

¹ Non est inventa creatura similis Virgini in gratia humilitatis.

² Audis Virginem, audis humilem.

the Old Law? But he could not make up his mind to do that, or to entertain such a suspicion of her. He determined then to put her away privately, and to abandon her; and had he done so, what would have become of Mary? She would have been looked on as a wanton by all the people, who would probably have stoned her. No doubt the Blessed Virgin remarked the troubled state of Joseph's mind; at least she must have known that her condition would cause him to think strange things of her; yet she kept silent. How easily she might have put an end to all the embarrassment by saying to him: My beloved Joseph, be not amazed at what you see; it is the supernatural work of the Holy Ghost; He who is to be born of me is the Son of the Most High; I shall indeed be His Mother, but at the same time I shall remain a virgin; I am she of whom the Prophet said: "Behold a virgin shall conceive and bear a Son;"¹ to God nothing is impossible. Those words would certainly have sufficed to relieve Joseph of the troublesome thoughts and doubts that were agitating him, and to free the Blessed Virgin herself from all suspicion of shame. But no such word fell from the lips of Mary. She left everything in the hands of Divine Providence, and was prepared rather to bear the shame of being accused of adultery than to declare to a single soul, to her own praise and justification, that she was the Mother of God. Thus the Lord was compelled, so to speak, to send an angel from heaven to protect her honor and reveal the mystery to Joseph.

Oh, most amazing humility and wonderful self-abasement of such a great soul! I have read of many saints who through humility and the fear of being praised refused the dignities offered them; they hid themselves away from the sight of men; they concealed as well as they could their good works, and yet, when their good name required it, they did not hesitate to prove their innocence and virtue, if not for the purpose of seeking honor, at least to put a stop to calumny. Who can doubt that Judith was humble? In the days of her widowhood she led a quiet and retired life in her own house, and yet was she not most careful when she came out of the tent of Holofernes to remove at once any suspicion regarding her purity that might arise in the minds of the Jews? "As the same Lord liveth," said she before being asked any question and confirming her assertion with an oath, "His angel hath been my keeper both going hence, and abiding

We see no
humility
like that in
other
saints.

¹ Ecce Virgo concepit et pariet filium. Is. vii. 14.

there, and returning from thence hither; and the Lord hath not suffered me His handmaid to be defiled." ¹ Humble was Job on the dung-hill; yet when his friends attributed his sufferings to some wickedness on his part, he at once declared that his conscience was free from blame, and that during his whole life he had no fault to accuse himself of, but on the contrary had always been an eye to the blind, a foot to the lame, and a father to the poor and the orphan. Humble was Paul; yet when some of the Corinthians made little of his teaching because he had not been chosen by Our Lord personally as the other apostles had been, he told them straight out that he had not done less than the great apostles, and then he relates in detail his visions and ecstasies, his many arduous labors, the dangers and difficulties he had to contend with in his apostolic career. So that it is not inconsistent with true humility and sanctity to make known one's virtues and the special favors received from God when there is no other means of saving one's good name. Mary alone was the first and greatest of all humble souls; for even when her good name and the necessity of averting a suspicion of a shameful crime required her to speak, she said not a word in favor of her honor. Must we not then acknowledge that no one has been found equal to her in the grace of humility?

During life she did not use her power of working miracles.

I repeat with St. Bernard that it would be unjust to believe that what has been granted to even some men has not been granted to her. Therefore next after Our Lord she possessed more than all men the power over nature; she had the gift of prophecy, of healing, of driving out devils, of working miracles; and yet who ever heard of her using that power or these graces? Although there are thousands of books written in her praise, where can you find one book, one holy Father or doctor of the Church to state that this Blessed Virgin worked even one miracle in her whole life? The disciples once came to Our Lord rejoicing and boasting of how they had healed most desperate maladies, and done other wonderful things in His name; nay, that they had even driven out devils: "Lord, the devils also are subject to us in Thy name."² It is indeed a wonderful thing to be able to restore sight to the blind and the power of motion to the lame, to cross rivers dryshod, to call down fire from heaven, to raise the dead to life, to

¹ Vivit autem ipse Dominus, quoniam custodivit me angelus ejus et hinc euntem, et ibi commorantem, et inde huc revertentem, et non permisit me Dominus ancillam suam coquinari.—Judith xiii. 20.

² Domine, etiam dæmonia subjiciuntur nobis in nomine tuo.—Luke x. 17.

move mountains from one place to another; but this power is common among holy servants of God. Had the Blessed Mother of God less power perhaps? It would be an insult to her merely to entertain a suspicion of the kind; and yet no one can or dares say that ever during her life she gave proof of being so endowed. There is no one found to equal the Blessed Virgin in the grace of humility.

Nor do we read of her ever having been disturbed, unless when something was said in her praise and to her honor. How troubled and almost beside herself she was at the salutation of the angel! "She was troubled,"¹ says St. Luke. Why? Was it because she saw an angel, and heard him speak to her alone? But if we are to believe the assurances of the holy Fathers, she was accustomed to be visited and attended by angels. No, as Eusebius Emisenus beautifully remarks, the text does not say that she was troubled at the sight and appearance of the angel, but at his words: "She was troubled at his saying."² What made her uneasy were the extraordinary words of praise and the honorable title by which she was greeted. "And the angel being come in, said unto her: Hail, full of grace; the Lord is with thee: Blessed art thou among women."³ "Who having heard," her humility was alarmed, "and she thought with herself what manner of salutation this should be."⁴ She could not imagine how those words could be addressed to her, nor how she had deserved them. And on another occasion, when Elizabeth addressed and honored her as the Mother of God, how quickly her humility found a means of turning the praise from herself! "Whence is this to me," said Elizabeth, that the Mother of my Lord should come to me," and deign to visit me?" "Blessed art thou among women."⁵ The humble Virgin, unable to bear so much praise, interrupted the discourse at once, and turned it in another direction: "And Mary said: My soul doth magnify the Lord;"⁶ the Lord who exalts the humble and lowly of heart, and to whom alone belongs all praise! At once she sank in thought into the depths of her own nothingness, and filled with confusion

She always avoided praise.

¹ Turbata est. — Luke i. 29.

² In sermone ejus.

³ Ingressus angelus ad eam, dixit: Ave gratia plena: Dominus tecum: benedicta tu in mulieribus. — Ibid. 28.

⁴ Quæ cum audisset, cogitabat qualis esset ista salutatio. — Ibid. 29.

⁵ Unde hoc mihi ut veniat mater Domini mei ad me? Benedicta tu inter mulieres. — Ibid. 43, 42.

⁶ Att Maria: magnificat anima mea Dominum. — Ibid. 46.

brought forward everything that might serve to abase and vilify herself: "He hath regarded the humility of His handmaid;"¹ that is, as commentators tell us, the great and mighty God deigned to look without horror and disgust at a poor, mean, and worthless creature, who had nothing of herself, and was the meanest of all His servants!

And sought every opportunity of self-abasement.

And as she was most diligent in avoiding all praise, she was also eager in the search of opportunities of abasing and rendering herself contemptible. We do not read of her having been seen in public with her divine Son when He was working miracles to the great admiration of the people, or in His triumphal entry into Jerusalem; so that no one might point to her and say: See, there is the Mother of that great and holy Man! Once she was with Him at Cana in Galilee at the marriage-feast, but it was among poor people, and when her charity for them induced her to intercede with her Son in their favor, she did it secretly so as not to attract any notice, and merely said to Him: "They have no wine."² On another occasion when she had to speak with Him as He was occupied with a number of people, she stood apart outside the door as if she were a poor woman who had no right to approach Him or to enter the house, as we read in the Gospel of St. Matthew: "Behold His Mother and His brethren stood without, seeking to speak to Him."³ Oh, what humility, exclaims St. Bernard struck with amazement at this; Mary stood outside desiring to speak with her Son; and yet she concealed her maternal authority, and neither interrupted His discourse, nor entered the house in which her Son was.⁴ But when her Son was afterwards apprehended and laden with chains as a thief, condemned to die on the cross, and led publicly to execution with the cross on His shoulders, then His Mother showed herself, and took part in the shameful procession; and while He was hanging there, mocked and insulted by the rabble as the worst of men, she stood at the foot of the cross; that was an occasion on which she could well bear to be recognized as His Mother. We may imagine what scornful and insulting words were addressed to her: See there is the Mother of that wretched Man, and so on. In a word, she accepted whatever helped to make her appear contempti-

¹ Respexit humilitatem ancillæ suæ.—Luke i. 48.

² Vinum non habent.—John ii. 3.

³ Ecce mater ejus et fratres stabant foris, querentes loqui ei.—Matt. xii. 46.

⁴ Foris stabat querens loqui Filio; nec materna autoritate aut sermonem interrupit, aut in habitationem irruit, in qua Filius loquebatur.

ble, spoke of herself as unworthy, and whatever she could not say against herself with truth, that she wished to allow others to imagine of her at least, as we see clearly from the Purification. She was always a most pure and inviolate virgin, and therefore was not subject to the Jewish law of purification; nor could she say the contrary with truth; yet she allowed the contrary to be imagined of her, when she appeared as other women should in such circumstances at the door of the temple to receive the blessing and to fulfil the law in every particular. It is true, therefore, that no one can be found to equal the Blessed Virgin in the grace of humility.

Now, my dear brethren, I reason thus with the theologian of whom I have spoken already, Anthony Perez, and I think his reasoning is not incorrect: Mary, that most enlightened and humble virgin, knew well that all men who are descended from Adam have sinned in Adam; she knew too how it was with her own soul in her conception; if she had not known that through her divine Son she was exempted from the general and sorrowful inheritance of sin; if she had known or imagined that she like other mortals was conceived in sin and had remained in that state even for a moment, certainly her humility would not have allowed her to conceal that fact, but she would have found some opportunity of making it known. For, what a fine chance that would have been for her to do what she was most eager to do! There was no better means for her to abuse herself and to show that she was unworthy of the gifts of God than to say: I have been a poor sinner like other mortals. These few words would have sufficed to neutralize all the praise and honor given her by others, which she so carefully tried to shun and feared so much. Ah, she might have said, why do you praise me? I have been an enemy of God, a child of eternal death! Nor should she then have had such occasion to be alarmed at the words of the angel: full of grace; for with downcast eyes and every sign of confusion she might have answered him: yet I was once without grace, and in the state of sin. "The Lord is with thee." But I was once against the Lord, an object of hatred and aversion to Him! "Blessed art thou among women;" yet I was once accursed like other women! And when she was told that she should be the Mother of God, instead of answering as she did: "How shall this be done?"¹ she might with still greater amazement and confusion have said, persuaded

If Mary had thought herself conceived in sin, she would have made it known as a humiliation.

¹ Quomodo fiet istud?—Luke i. 34.

of her own unworthiness: How can the God of holiness degrade Himself so as to enter into this body of mine, which was once subject to sin and to the power of the devil? Then indeed could she have made use of the words spoken on another occasion by St. Peter, when he found himself in the same ship with Our Lord: "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord."¹ But that most humble creature said none of all these things, nor made the least allusion to sin, although she had every opportunity of so doing. Now that fact is enough to convince me that she could not say such things of herself because she knew the contrary to be the case. Again, it is certain that, when the Blessed Virgin burst forth into that most devout and humble canticle: My soul doth magnify the Lord; when she was praised by Elizabeth, she brought forward every fact she could find to show her unworthiness of the great favors and graces bestowed on her by the divine mercy; therefore she said that God did not despise the lowliness of His handmaid. There is not the slightest doubt that if the least stain of original sin had ever attached to her, she would not have forgotten to speak of it on that occasion, partly to make known her own unworthiness, and partly to show the world in a still brighter light the greatness of the divine mercy. And then instead of saying: "He hath regarded the humility of His handmaid," she could with more reason have replied: He hath not despised His enemy on account of her iniquity. For then she would have attained her object much better, and shown that she was utterly unfit and unworthy to be the Mother of the supreme God, whose enemy she had once been.

As other
saints have
done
through hu-
mility.

Indeed, I fail to understand how the Blessed Virgin, that most humble of all mere creatures, should, if she could have used it with truth, have neglected to profit by such an opportunity of humbling herself; although she knew well that a confession of the kind is pleasing to God and good for the soul. All other saints, although far behind Mary in humility and perfection, were wont to make public confessions of the kind to their own most salutary humiliation. How eloquently St. Jerome describes in his Epistles the vanities to which he was addicted in his youth! St. Anselm in his writings bewails similar excesses of which he had been guilty. And has not St. Augustine left to the world a whole book in which he describes, in detail, the shameful vices in which he had indulged, and that too with such attractions of

¹ *Exi a me, quia homo peccator sum, Domine.*—Luke v. 8.

style as if he wished to make the book entertaining, and thus induce men to read it? Matthew acknowledges himself to have been a public sinner; Paul tells us that he was an enemy and persecutor of Christ. And to keep to our subject of original sin: long before the time of Mary, King David made the same confession to his own humiliation, when he sighed and complained: "Behold I was conceived in iniquities; and in sins did my mother conceive me."¹

Most humble Virgin, and at the same time sovereign Lady of the world, and my own dearest Mother! let me ask thee but one question: Hadst thou probably not read this confession of David thy ancestor? Hadst thou not approved of and praised it, as the Catholic Church now does? If so, why wert thou ashamed to follow such a brilliant example, and to make a similar confession, which would indeed have suited thee well? Thou didst speak of thyself as a servant, and indeed the lowest of the servants of the Lord; truly a great humiliation, for thou knewest thou wert the Mother of the Lord; but couldst thou not have sunk deeper into the abyss of thy nothingness by saying that thou too wert in the number of sinners? Pardon me for having dared to give thee such a shameful title, and for even imagining that it could belong to thee for a moment. But thou hast never made such an acknowledgment even by a sign.

But she never gave the least sign of believing that.

And this it is that convinces me that thou couldst not have done it without violating the truth; and hence in spite of thy great love of humiliations, thou couldst never dare to say of thyself: Behold I was conceived in sin; but thou hast been obliged to keep within the bounds of truth and to say: "He hath regarded the humility of His handmaid:" that was the most humiliating thing thou couldst say of thyself. So it is, Immaculate Virgin! If I had none of the many proofs of thy Immaculate Conception that are furnished by the Fathers of the Church, by all the nations of the earth, by reason itself; if thou thyself hadst not said to St. Bridget: "It is true that I was conceived without sin,"² as we read in her Revelations, which after long examination have been approved of by four Popes; then thy very silence under those circumstances, founded on thy great wisdom and humility, is quite enough to convince me of this truth, and to make me confess publicly before the world that "there is no spot in thee."

Hence she could not do so with truth, and her silence is a proof of her Immaculate Conception.

¹ Ecce enim in iniquitatibus conceptus sum; et in peccatis concepit me mater mea.—Ps. 1. 7.

² Veritas est quod ego fui concepta sine peccato originali.—S. Brigid, Revel. L. 6. c. 49.

Thou hadst no share in the sin of Adam ; thou wert always pure and unstained ; always the most holy, chaste, perfect, and worthy of all mere creatures that are made in and under the heavens ! “ There is no spot in thee ! ” Truly that we believe and swear to, for that we are willing to live and die ! Therefore we rejoice and congratulate thee on an honor that belongs to thee alone after thy divine Son !

Moral lesson and conclusion.

There is one other consideration which partly shames us and partly obliges us to sigh to thee. What makes us ashamed is our inborn pride, by which, although we know that we are all not only conceived in original sin, but also stained with countless actual sins and faults, we yet esteem ourselves great, and strive for praise and honor before the world, while we resent the least insult or injury done us, and carefully hide and palliate and excuse our faults and sins as if we were innocence itself. Nay, we dread shame so much that in the place where we should be cleansed from our grievous sins, that is in the confessional, we sometimes conceal our sins, or do not confess them as we ought, and so remain for years with the guilt of them on our souls. O humility, how well-known and pleasing thou art to Mary, the most excellent of creatures ! how hateful and far-removed thou art from vile sinners ! And what forces us to fly to thee, O Mary, is the lamentable state of our souls ; perhaps some of those present are now in the state of sin, in any case all of us are in constant danger of falling into new sins. For both classes (and we all belong to the latter) we send forth our fervent petition to thee, O purest Virgin, who art without any stain ! Thou art the mother we have chosen ; we are thy adopted children. Soften then the hard hearts of sinners, that on this great day of thine they may by true repentance and a good confession purge their souls from the filth of sin. And for all others obtain from thy divine Son, as thou canst, the grace to live so carefully in future that we may never again stain our souls by a mortal sin, and that especially in the moment of our departure from earth we may appear before thy Son, our Judge, spotless and stainless, and thus rejoice with thee, dearest Mother, forever in heaven. **Amen.**

TWENTY-SEVENTH SERMON.

ON THE ESTEEM IN WHICH MARY HELD HER IMMACULATE CONCEPTION.

Subject.

1. Mary would have preferred to lose all her extraordinary graces and privileges, rather than to be for a single instant in the state of original sin. 2. Many men prefer often to be in the state of sin, and to lose God and their eternal happiness, rather than forego a momentary pleasure.—*Preached on the feast of the Immaculate Conception.*

Text.

Tota pulchra es, amica mea, et macula non est in te.—Cant. iv. 7.
“Thou art all fair, O my love, and there is not a spot in thee.”

Introduction.

So it is; from all eternity God has ordained that Mary should never be subject to the least stain of sin, and not even for a moment be under the primeval curse, but that she should be for all time and eternity pure and unstained, since she was chosen to be the Mother of Him who takes away the sins of the world. This is now acknowledged by all zealous servants of Mary; to doubt it is a sign of little love for this pure Virgin. It is unnecessary nowadays to spend a long time in proving this truth; and not to believe it, although there are such good grounds for believing it, is a sign of a want of affection for the Mother of God, as I have already proved on this very feast day. For it would have been a shameful and dishonorable thing for her to be conceived in original sin, and if the Blessed Virgin had the choice offered her, she would have preferred to sacrifice all her high dignities rather than be stained with that sin even for a moment. And this is what I mean to show in this sermon, which, in order to draw a moral lesson from it, I shall divide into two parts, as follows:

Plan of Discourse.

Mary would have preferred to lose all her extraordinary graces and dignities rather than be for a single moment in the state of original sin. The first and principal part, and at the same time

a panegyric on this Immaculate Virgin. Many of us men often choose to be in the state of sin, and thereby to lose God and all the treasures of our souls, rather than forego a momentary pleasure. The second part, and at the same time a deplorable proof of our blindness and folly.

To the end that we may conceive a greater esteem for the Immaculate Virgin, and a great horror of all sin, so that we would rather lose all the goods of earth than consent to, or remain in sin for a single moment. Do thou, O Immaculate Virgin, who wert never even for a moment stained by sin, with the holy angels, obtain this favor for us from Him who from all eternity chose thee as His Mother.

It is a great evil to be in original sin even for a moment.

When we speak of a moment in a long eternity, we might think the question of little importance, and imagine that it is not worth while for the Blessed Virgin to be much agitated by the idea of being excluded or not for that moment from the grace of God. For what does a moment matter? A time that lasts no longer than the twinkling of an eye? A time whose beginning and end are almost simultaneous? And Mary spent more than seventy years on earth. Divide all those years, if you can, into moments; how many millions of them there will be! You cannot count them. What matter then would it have made if among all those moments, in every one of which the merits and holiness of the Blessed Virgin were increased, there were one single instant that passed by without grace and merit? Should we look on King Solomon as less fortunate, if among the many tons of gold and silver he possessed, so that, as the Scripture says, the precious metals were in his time like the stones on the streets—if among all those treasures there were found one false coin? Should we look on Joseph, the viceroy of Egypt, as unfortunate because a worm ate one of the grains of corn with which his granaries were stored? Not by any means! A grain of corn is nothing to such an immense store; a bad coin lessens not the value of such great treasures. Why then should the most wise Queen of heaven think that a single moment of sin would lessen the glory and majesty to which she is raised by God, as one who is blessed among all the children of men, full of grace, and the Mother of the sovereign God? Why should she think that one such moment would take from the treasure of merits that she heaped up to so great an extent during her long life, that she far excels

all the spirits of heaven and all mere creatures? Nay, why should she rather be deprived of all these treasures than be for one moment without sanctifying grace? I acknowledge, my dear brethren, that the matter would not be of great importance, if there were not question of sin. And even when sin is concerned we blind mortals do not think much of a moment of time. But far different is the judgment formed in this matter by such a highly enlightened soul, who well knew what a great and monstrous evil it is to be in the state of sin even for one moment.

I wish I could depict for you in lively colors the miserable condition of the soul that is stained only with original sin (for we must not speak of actual sin where the Blessed Virgin is concerned). And yet since original sin does not come from our free will, and is not to be attributed to any fault of ours, so much as any actual sin; nevertheless the mere consideration of what it is would fill you with such horror and dread that you would agree with Mary in saying that it would be better to lose everything, if the choice were given you, rather than be subject to such an evil even for a short time. From the cause and injurious effects of this sin we can, to a certain extent, just as the father is known from his children and the tree from its fruits, form an idea of its malice and hideousness. Original sin, when we consider its cause and source, is an offspring of hell, brought forth by the demon whom hatred of God and envy of us men has driven to the very extreme of fury; and therefore he attacked our first parents so craftily, that he might have companions in the infernal flames that torture him; therefore he induced them to commit this sin, as the Wise Man says: "By the envy of the devil death came into the world."¹ That monster, which owes its origin to such a hideous parent, could give birth only to children like itself, that is, to monstrosities and abominations, evils and punishments. Hardly had Adam eaten the forbidden fruit and swallowed the first morsel of it, when—alas! that we must say what we cannot bear to think of without the most poignant grief!—when Adam and we with him were thrust out of Paradise, in which we might have lived in all imaginable pleasures without the least fear of evil, and filled with anguish, shame, and terror were forced into the world, cursed as it was by God: "Cursed is the earth in thy work;"² amongst savage beasts raging against each

Shown
from the
effects of
sin.

¹ *Invidia diaboli mors introiit in orbem terrarum.—Wis. ii. 24.*

² *Maledicta terra in opere tuo.—Gen. iii. 17.*

other, although they had before been quite tame ; and thus banished were condemned to work in the sweat of our brow like galley-slaves, given over to death which we have to expect at any hour and moment in the midst of all our miseries, until the sword of divine justice at last takes away our lives. O wretched morsel of forbidden fruit, how dear thou hast cost us all ! and how thou hast set our teeth on edge !

From the terrible punishments inflicted on it by God.

But this is not all. Each and every trouble endured since the world began, all the trials we now have to suffer, all that have to be suffered till the end of the world, all cry out with one voice : we, we are the effects of one sin ; we are the ministers of justice who take vengeance on men for that one first sin ! The world is now over five thousand years old, yet not one man has been found on it who has not had to suffer till death from the unhappy consequences of this sin. Count, if you can, all the miseries to which the soul and the body are subject ; ignorance and darkness in our minds, deordination in our wills, weakness in our freedom, corruption in our memories, rebellion and disorder in our desires and appetites, and the countless diseases which fill our hospitals with moans and lamentations ; reckon up the burning fevers, the acute pains and aches that torture the body, the teeth, eyes, ears, and head, the loathsome ulcers and cancers that eat away the flesh, and the numberless other frailties that torment the human frame ; add to these the devastations of war and its cruelties, violent storms, fire, inundations, hostile incursions, heat, cold, hunger, thirst, etc., calamities that assail our lives in this wretched vale of tears ; collect into a heap all the remains of all who have ever died in the world ; and when you have considered it all with great grief and sorrow of heart, alas ! you will exclaim, is all that misery the result of one sin that was accomplished in a moment ? Truly it is ; that one sin opened the door to all those calamities. That we are now conceived children of wrath ; that we are born wailing and weeping ; that we are inclined to evil from our youth upwards ; that we find in us that law of which the Apostle complains : “ I see another law in my members, fighting against the law of my mind, and captivating me in the law of sin, that is in my members.”¹ That our hearts are trammelled by a thousand desires, disquieted by countless cares, distracted by unceasing combats, weakened

¹ *Video aliam legem in membris meis, repugnantem legi mentis meae, et captivantem me in lege peccati quae est in membris meis.*—Rom. vii. 23.

by labor and toil, often driven to desperation by poverty and other trials ; that so many innocent people are oppressed and persecuted ; that so many are cruelly tortured by tyrants ; that we have often so much to suffer in our good name and honor by insults, injuries, calumny ; that so many wars have occurred up to the present time, so many cities have been plundered, so many thousands of men cut down by their fellow-men, so many countries turned into horrible deserts ; that towns are filled with unjust usurers, houses with thieves, forests with murderers, the sea with pirates, the world with heathens, Turks, infidels, idolaters, heretics, and wicked men ; that so many millions of sins have been committed and will be committed to the end ; that so many children die without baptism, and thus lose heaven ; that hell is so full of lost souls ; that the greater number of men are lost eternally : these and others are the evils due to original sin alone ; these evils are the punishment inflicted by a just God for that one bite of the apple, without which act of disobedience the world would not have known of such calamities.

Ah, God of infinite goodness, is Thy anger then so great? Does one sin deserve such terrible chastisements? Yes, Thy judgments are righteous ; and all these terrible punishments, even if they were to last forever, could not atone for the guilt of sin nor satisfy in the least the divine justice ; for in addition to them all, the infinite God Himself had to suffer, God had to be crucified, God had to die on the gibbet in order to atone fully for this one sin. Oh, what a terrible evil thou art, O sin ! How hateful thou must be to God ! How hateful in His sight thou makest the human soul ! Yet why have I delayed so long in describing the effects of this sin ? It would have been enough for my purpose if I had simply said that sin, once it has defiled the soul, makes man hateful to God, makes him an enemy of God, makes him an abomination in the sight of God. This hatred and disfavor in the eyes of God seem to St. John Chrysostom more intolerable than all imaginable punishments, nay, more terrible than a thousand hells.¹

Now, my dear brethren, I will let you decide the question yourselves. Could Mary, that highly enlightened and most wise soul, if the choice had been given her, have selected to live in such a state even for a moment? It is the undeniable teaching of the great St. Augustine and of all theologians that one should not commit

And even they are not enough to satisfy God for it.

Hence Mary would have preferred to give up her special gifts than to be for a mo-

¹ *Mille gehennis durior, et intolerabilius iudicio, exosum esse Christo.*

ment in
original sin.

even one venial sin, if it were only by telling a jocose lie, in order thereby to extinguish the flames of hell and to bring to heaven all the lost souls as well as those who are in purgatory, and those who are still on earth ; for what is bad in itself can never be allowed for any cause whatever, or for any advantage, whether temporal or spiritual ; and therefore it would be better and more preferable that the heavens should collapse and all things be reduced to nothing, or that all the saints and all creatures should without sin be condemned to hell, than that the great and infinite God should be offended even by one white lie. (Mark this well, you who imagine that a lie is often lawful to preserve peace in the family, or to avert a word of reproof or some other evil. Ah! you little know what an abominable evil even a venial sin is in the sight of God!) And yet a lie of the kind does not take from us the friendship of God ; it does not deprive us of the beautiful robe of grace, nor does it bring down reprobation on us. Is there then any good, the desire of which could blind to the deformity of a mortal sin, such as original sin is, that most wise Virgin, whose hatred of any offence against God is supreme, and who after God and her divine Son had the most perfect knowledge of all things, and therefore knew well the difference between good and evil? What good could be imagined for the sake of which that most holy Virgin, who always burned with a more than seraphic love of God, would choose even for a moment to be hated and cursed by God? Place on one side all the excellent dignities of this Virgin, all the natural and spiritual gifts with which the Holy Ghost had decorated her as His beloved spouse ; collect together all the high-sounding titles conferred on her by the Spouse in the Canticles ; all the many honorable names applied to her by the holy Scriptures, the Fathers of the Church, and the whole Catholic Church itself, names which exalt her above all other creatures, and so to speak almost to the throne of God Himself ; and place along with these surpassing honors and dignities that greatest privilege of all by which she attained the priceless honor of having God Himself as her Son, so that she is in very truth the Mother of God ; and can one give her greater praise than to say of her that she is the Virgin of whom was born Jesus? Now place on the other side the state of original sin only for one moment ; give her the choice between the two ; which will she select?

For she
would have

This is not a matter that requires much consideration. She already made known her feelings about it when the angel brought

her the joyful tidings that she was to be the Mother of God, preferred not to be Mother of God than not to be a virgin.

“How shall this be done,” she asked, disturbed at the idea, “because I know not man?”¹ And could she who prized so highly the integrity of her virginal body think less of the innocence and purity of her soul? She certainly could without sin have consented to marry. And yet she did not wish to do so without an express command on the part of God, and according to the opinion of some of the Fathers, she would rather have refused the dignity of Mother of God than have lost her virginity. Now, I ask, is it possible that she could have thought more lightly of a sin that would have made her an enemy of God, deprived of His grace? No, she would have exclaimed; take from me the fulness of natural gifts, count me in the number of ordinary but sinless women, rob me of all my special dignities and privileges; only allow me to be free from all sin; for that one favor, that one honor and glory I am willing to give up all the rest. For if I am not a virgin so highly favored by God, yet I can say that I have never been in disgrace with Him; if I am not blessed among women, I have never been accursed by Him; if I am not the Queen of the angels, I have never been a slave of the devil; if I am not the Mother of God, I have never even for a moment been an enemy of God; and thus I have always been in the love of God, always immaculate, without spot or stain.

Truly, O most prudent Virgin, thou art all fair, and there is no spot in thee; never for a moment has there been the least sin on thy soul! This honor and glory has been reserved for thee alone from eternity, and amongst all mere creatures it has been appointed for and conferred on thee only. Thou alone hast crushed the head of the serpent that has poisoned all other mortals; and thou hast remained always a virgin, blessed above all, raised above the angels, and moreover thou art the Mother of the eternal God! Thus in the joy of our hearts we congratulate thee; thus we believe with all our minds; thus we confess and will maintain forever with our lips; thus we honor thee with the deepest reverence and due respect: “Thou art all fair, and there is not a spot in thee.” Not for a moment hast thou been a sinner, or in the state of sin! But, ah, immaculate and sinless Virgin, how is it with us in this respect? What do we think of sin, which thou regardest with such horror? This, my dear brethren, we shall briefly consider in the

Mary congratulated on being always free from original sin.

¹ *Quomodo fiet istud, quoniam virum non cognosco?*—Luke 1. 34.

Second Part.

We should suffer all imaginable evils rather than commit one mortal sin.

Yes, I ask again, how is it with us in this particular? Alas! such a congratulation is not for us! It is too late! In sin have our mothers conceived us; sin we have brought with us into the world as our inheritance! Yet, to say the truth, we are not worthy of such a favor. For thee alone as the Mother of our Redeemer was such an exception fitting, and that we should have brought sin with us into the world was only suitable to the state of slavery in which we are born. Praise and thanks be to God that we have been cleansed from this filth in holy baptism, and been made children of God! But alas! I must sigh forth for the third time, how has it been with us after this cleansing? Is there no other sin besides original sin? Alas! there are only too many of our own actual sins! Let each one enter into his own conscience and see how many he has committed during his life. Are they perhaps a lesser evil than the first original sin? And if that deserved such fearful chastisement, and brought down on us to such an extent the wrath of God, although since our liberty was not concerned in it, we were not so much to blame on account of it, and in comparison with the other sins, it is only as it were a grain—shall our actual sins, committed deliberately with our free will, knowingly, advertently, purposely, and wantonly, shall they deserve a lesser punishment? Now, my dear brethren, if we are prudent and well understand the malice of even a momentary sin, what other conclusion can we reasonably come to than that it is better to lose all we have, and our lives in the bargain, than to offend God by even one sin? Better to choose all the evils of this life, and to suffer all imaginable misfortunes, than to consent to mortal sin even for one moment, because that is the evil of evils, the cause and origin of all evil.

And yet we commit it so often for a trifling pleasure.

But alas! I must again sigh forth, how little we think of a sin! How many threats are required to induce us to commit it? How much must be offered us to lead us into it? It would seem that sin is only an imaginary evil, a mere joke or amusement, so little does it trouble us. It would seem that it is a desirable and good thing, so eagerly do we stretch forth both hands to it. It is committed not once, but dozens, hundreds, and thousands of times; not merely on one occasion, but every day, every hour; it is nurtured in the conscience not merely for a moment, but for whole years at a time. And why? To enjoy, or not to lose. What?

A trifling pleasure of the mind, a delight of the eyes, a pleasant word in the ears, a sweetness in the taste, a gratification of the palate, a lust of the flesh, a comfort of the body ; in a word, to enjoy or not to lose a pleasure. And what sort of a pleasure? One that will last a few hundred years? But if it lasted forever we should renounce it. And alas! the pleasure for which we sin is only a momentary, imaginary, and false pleasure! "What delights is only momentary,"¹ says St. Chrysologus.

Tell me, O man, in what consists that pleasure that you expect or feel when you sin? What do you seek and desire by your pride? A moment in which another forms a good opinion of you; the favor of some mortal, that lasts for a day and then disappears like smoke. "What delights is only momentary." What do you gain by avarice and injustice? A handful of money, that you can hold but for a short time, and that you often make away with in a moment or two. "What delights is only momentary." What do you enjoy by impurity? A momentary delight, that you feel when you consent to an impure thought, speak or listen to an unchaste word, cast a lewd glance on a bad picture or a person of the other sex, or otherwise satisfy your brutal lust. "What delights is only momentary." What do you gain by your vindictiveness, envy, anger, hatred? A moment of pleasure in which you gratify your resentment, rejoice at another's harm, or think how you can be even with your enemy, and work your spite on him. "What delights is only momentary." For a moment we are pleased with sin, for as soon as our will consents even in thought to the forbidden thing, in that moment the sin is accomplished and the forbidden pleasure enjoyed. Would to God that not many of you perhaps knew the truth of this by your own experience! I speak now to you who have ever committed a mortal sin; what remains now to you of the pleasure you enjoyed? What is now left to you of the delight you felt last week, yesterday, last night, this morning, half an hour ago, when you consented to sin? Where has that joy gone to? Alas! you must confess that you have none of it left; that it is as if it had never been.

Meanwhile you have not hesitated for the sake of that momentary pleasure to choose the wretched state of so many sins; and not to lose that momentary pleasure you have deliberately brought down on your head all imaginable evils and the eternal,

That lasts
but a moment.

And we
lose there-
by all su-
pernatural
goods and
merit.

¹ Momentaneum est quod delectat.

endless punishment that awaits sin. To enjoy this momentary pleasure you have bartered willingly all imaginable, heavenly, and supernatural goods, all the dignities, gifts, and treasures of your soul; for the sake of that moment you have in the same moment lost the friendship of God, lost the virtues infused into your soul, the wedding-garment of sanctifying grace, the gifts of the Holy Ghost, the right of being a child of God and of profiting by the fatherly care that God takes of His children; you have lost all right and title to the kingdom of heaven, all the power and ability of doing anything worthy of an eternal reward; you have lost the consolations of the Holy Ghost, the tender love of your guardian angel, the participation in the merits of Christ; you have lost all the graces ever gained during your life by the worthy reception of the holy sacraments, and at the same time all the merits of your good works. Examine your past life: where are your pious practices? the holy Masses you used to hear? the humble declaration of your sins in confession? the holy Communion by which you increased your merits by partaking of the body and blood of Christ? Where are your fasting, praying, alms-giving, and other works of charity? Where the patience and resignation to the will of God you used to show in adversity? Where the labor and trouble you endured in performing the duties of your state of life? In a word, what has become of all the good you have ever done? Alas! poor fool! you have lost it all in the moment in which you consented to grievous sin. Hear what the Lord says by the Prophet Ezechiel: “If the just man turn himself away from his justice, and do iniquity”—what then? “All his justices which he had done shall not be remembered.”¹ Imagine that you have already spent a hundred thousand years in serving God zealously; that you have more sanctifying grace than all other men, than all the angels, than the Mother of God herself; that during all that time you have every moment shed hot tears of burning supernatural love for God; that every day you scourged yourself to blood, endured all the torments of the martyrs, converted all sinners by your zeal, and freed all the poor souls out of purgatory; that you thus every moment merited more glory in heaven than all creatures could do during their whole lives; imagine now that the time is come when you are about to leave the world, to garner in this

¹ Si autem averterit se justus a justitia sua, et fecerit iniquitatem, omnes justitiæ ejus quas fecerat, non recordabuntur.—Ezech. x. lil. 24.

immense treasury of merit, and that you, the holiest and happiest of creatures, only for a moment willingly consent to a forbidden thought; ah, poor man! all your merit, labor, and toil are lost in an instant; you have forfeited everything; all your justices, as long as you are in the state of sin, shall not be remembered; you will be as if you had never in your life done anything good, and if you die unrepentant, then alas for you! all shall remain lost, in spite of your former merits you must go to hell and burn there forever without hope of mercy or release. Oh, truly that would be an irreparable loss!

O momentary sin, what a terrible thing thou art! And blind mortals that we are, how little we think of thee, since the consideration of the loss thou causest us does not make us faint with horror! A man of high standing is suddenly deprived of his position; a merchant loses his costly wares by shipwreck; a wife is deprived of her beloved husband by cruel murderers; oh, what lamentations and weepings are called forth by such accidents! They are enough to move heaven and earth to pity! And many a one is thereby driven to such desperation that he takes away his own life. Yes! Consider the state of him who has lost in gambling during one afternoon the sum of a hundred ducats; how troubled he looks as he returns home! It seems as if a heavy thundercloud had settled on his brows. At home he has not a good word for any one; wife, children, domestics must keep out of his way; he has no appetite for his meals, and spends a sleepless night in all sorts of troublous thoughts; in the morning he knows not what to do through sheer sadness; the hundred ducats he has lost seem to have taken all he has with them. And see how wretched is our condition! We have often in a moment, for the sake of some proffered pleasure, bartered heaven and God with all His riches. This is done daily, and we take no notice of it! We are less concerned than if we had lost a penny; we are as little troubled as if a fly had flown out of the room. And we say, moreover, with smiling countenances: "I have sinned, and what harm hath befallen me?"¹ We are as merry as if some wonderful piece of good fortune had happened to us. O blindness and folly! If we knew the greatness of our loss we should bewail it with bitter tears and lamentations, and should never cease regretting it. King Saul once forbade any of his soldiers under pain of death to taste food till after

Smiles showing this blindness.

¹ Peccavi, et quid mihi accidit triste?—Eccius. v. 4.

sunset; Jonathan, his son and heir, was very tired and hungry, and knew nothing of this prohibition, so he stretched out his rod, dipped it into a honeycomb that he happened to find, and tasted a little honey. For this Saul condemned him to death. Alas! sighed Jonathan, when he heard of the cruel fate that awaited him: "I did but taste a little honey with the end of the rod which was in my hand, and behold I must die." ¹ A little honey! Truly his joy was a short-lived one! And behold I must die; I must lose my crown and my life! Truly a hard punishment!

Sorrow for
this blind-
ness, and
resolve to
lose all
rather than
commit sin.

O my sovereign God, what have I done when I offended Thee? I have lost more than a crown and a kingdom and my temporal life. I have tasted a little honey, enjoyed a passing pleasure, and for the sake of it I have given up Thee and all that is good for all eternity! By a forbidden thought, a word, an unchaste look, an unlawful desire, an impure touch, I have tasted a little honey, and have thereby lost eternal life! Yes, O Lord, that is what I have done! And I cannot deny it. I have done it often. Oh, foolish man that I am, what a wretched exchange I have made! Where was my common sense, my reason, my powers of reflection? I am terrified when I think of this blindness of mine, which I now detest with my whole heart and will bewail all my life. Never more, O Lord (and this I promise trusting in Thy grace), never again shall that happen; rather will I lose all the goods of the world, and give up everything that is dear to me on earth, and suffer every evil, than consent to sin for a moment. Give to me, O Lord, increase, and preserve in me and in all this horror, dread, and hatred of sin, through the intercession of her who was never in sin for a moment, that is, of the immaculate Virgin Mary, whom Thou didst choose from all eternity to be Thy Mother. Amen.

TWENTY-EIGHTH SERMON.

ON THE JOYFUL FEAST OF THE NATIVITY OF THE BLESSED
VIRGIN MARY.

Subject.

All men have reason to rejoice on this day, but especially the people of Treves.—*Preached on the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary.*

¹ Gustans gustavi in summitate virgæ quæ erat in manu mea, paululum mellis, et ecce ego morior.—I. Kings xiv. 43.

Text.

Vocabitis hunc diem celeberrimum et sanctissimum.—Levit. xxiii. 21.

“ You shall call this day most solemn and most holy.”

Introduction.

Of all the solemnities and feast-days of the Jews in the Old Law, there was none kept with more celebration and public manifestations of joy than that thanksgiving feast on which they offered to the Lord the first fruits of all things, as a sign of gratitude for having been freed from the slavery of the Egyptians; and this was according to the command of God Himself: “ You shall call this day most solemn and most holy. It shall be an everlasting ordinance in all your dwellings and generations.”¹ My dear brethren, amongst all the festivals of the year I find none celebrated with more signs of joy and gladness than the feast of to-day. On no other occasion do we see the whole city turn out in order to offer sacrifice to the Lord. And indeed we the inhabitants of Treves have special reason for that.

Plan of Discourse.

1. *We have all reason for it.* 2. *But you especially, citizens of Treves. This without further preface I shall now endeavor to prove.*

I rely on the divine assistance, through the intercession of that Virgin whose birth on this day brought joy to the whole world.

If this day brought to our minds nothing but the birth of our sovereign Lady and Mother Mary, that alone should suffice to make us regard it as a great day and a most joyous feast. Whenever the birthday of a king or prince is celebrated, everything is in grand gala, as the saying goes, at court. As we read in Holy Writ, King Herod summoned the principal nobles of his kingdom to a sumptuous banquet in honor of his birthday. Yet on such occasions the joy is not always general; for the other subjects in the country have little share in it. If I told you now that this morning a son was born to one of your fellow-citizens; well, you would answer, what is that to me? It does not interest me at all. If I told you as a great piece of news that the sultan

The birthday of a great lord, who is of importance to a country, is held with joy by all.

¹ *Vocabitis hunc diem celeberrimum et sanctissimum. Legitimum sempiternum erit in cunctis habitaculis et generationibus vestris.—Levit. xxiii. 21.*

of Turkey, or the king of Morocco had a son and heir, you would not feel much interest in that either, and would think that it is all the same to you whether he has a son or not. But if I could tell you (and would that it lay in my power to do so!) that our illustrious emperor Charles VI. had a young archduke born to him; what a sudden and general feeling of joy I should awaken in all true German hearts! The firing of cannon the whole day long, the illuminations at night, the frequent hurrahs of the people would then give proof of the public satisfaction at the news. Why so? Because on such an event as that depends the happiness, the prosperity of the whole Roman empire; and therefore the joy and congratulations would be general.

Much more should we celebrate the birthday of Mary, who is of importance to the whole world.

Now see, my dear brethren, what reason we have to rejoice to-day; for on this day a child is born on whom depends, not the uncertain happiness of the Roman empire, but the certain salvation of the whole world. It is a child to whose birth the angels in heaven have been looking forward so long with exultation; one for whom men on earth have long been sighing; for whom the souls imprisoned in Limbo have been looking with eagerness. A virgin is born on this day who brought Him into the world whom we have to thank for being able to escape the fire of hell, if we only wish to do so. On this day is born Mary, the Queen of heaven and earth, and the Mother of us all. And if she had not been born, how would things have gone with us? Let us try to imagine our situation in that case. I will not say that we should not have had Jesus Christ our Saviour, who, according to the teaching of the holy Fathers, would not have assumed human nature from any one but her. I will suppose that the Word of God had become man, not indeed born of a woman, but that, like our first father Adam, He was sent into the world by the power of God in man's full estate, and that He had no virginal Mother. Alas, what a great blessing would have been lost to heaven and earth in that case! And how hell would have filled without this Mother of mercy! How few souls would have reached heaven without this ladder and gate of heaven! How many sinners would have despaired without this refuge of sinners! How many a one would have lost his case in the tribunal of God's justice without this advocate and intercessor between us and our Judge!

Stimle showing

With good reason does the Catholic Church sing to-day:
 "Let us celebrate with joy the Nativity of the Virgin whose

birth has brought happiness to the whole world." Truly to the whole world! All have their share in the joy she brought with her; all, so to speak, have helped in the triumph of her arrival amongst us. To form some idea of that triumph I imagine I behold, as we often see in paintings, the entry of a royal bride into the city of her spouse; the procession is opened by a long line of soldiers mounted on magnificently caparisoned horses, with drawn swords in their hands, and their helmets adorned with laurel branches; these are followed by the chief men and magistrates, by the mayor and his counsellors, all according to their rank; after them come the nobility in their carriages, attended by servants in costly liveries; then come the courtiers and ministers of state, one surpassing the other in magnificence; and last of all amid the clang of trumpets and roll of drums we see the royal bride in a carriage of state, attended by many guards and lackeys; after her the people follow in crowds, giving evidence of their joy by loud shouts. A poor description, as it seems to me, of the entry into this world, that is, of the birth, of our great empress Mary!

how the whole world united to make the birth of Mary a triumphal entry.

God could in the beginning have created this Virgin, the most excellent and amiable of all mere creatures, whom the Holy Ghost chose as His spouse, and the Son of God as His Mother; but much preparation was required beforehand for that event. Michael and his heavenly host had first to make their appearance with the nine choirs of angels as guards and attendants of the Queen of heaven; after them came the patriarchs of the Old Testament, who still at a great distance made known their desire for the arrival of her who was to come after them; then at different times and in different choirs came the prophets, who foretold in symbols and with prophetic spirit the advent and the privileges of Mary: "There shall come forth a rod out of the root of Jesse," says Isaias speaking for all the others, "and a flower shall rise up out of his root."¹ Have hope, ye peoples, and rejoice at what is to happen; we are the forerunners of a great Queen; in a little while she shall appear as a branch of the root of Jesse, and the most beautiful Flower of paradise shall come forth from her womb: "Behold a virgin shall conceive, and bear a Son."² After the prophets come a long line of Hebrew women, who symbolize Mary; Esther, who found favor in the

All helped to this before her birth.

¹ Egređitur virga de radice Jesse, et flos de radice ejus ascendet.—Is. xi. 1.

² Ecce virgo concipiet et pariet Filium.—Ibid. vii. 14.

eyes of Assuerus; Judith holding the sword with which she slew Holofernes; Rachel with her beauty; Susanna with her innocence; Debora with her fortitude; Abigail with her prudence—all were figures of the Blessed Virgin. Then in their order come the high-priests and anointed kings, all ancestors from whom she is descended. And at the end of this long and magnificent procession appears the ever-blessed royal Spouse and Mother of the Supreme Monarch, who was so longed for by the nations; Mary is born, and the whole world rejoices at her arrival. “Who is she that cometh forth as the morning rising,” so the heavenly spirits ask each other filled with ecstasy at her beauty and perfection, “fair as the moon, bright as the sun?”¹

All now rejoice after her birth.

The crowd of people who follow exultingly the joyful procession is the whole Catholic Church, which confesses that it owes the origin of its salvation to this Virgin, and therefore cries out with childlike confidence: Hail, Queen, Mother of mercy! Hail, our life, our sweetness, and our hope! And yearly on this day the Church renews, by appointing this as a special feast, the expression of her joyful congratulations by crying out again and again: “Let us celebrate with joy the Nativity of the Virgin!” So that we too, my dear brethren, who profess to be servants and attendants of this Queen of heaven, we too have just reason for joining in this festival of gladness and honor. Truly should we cry out with joyful hearts (and that we do so, we show by our presence here): Let us celebrate with joy the Nativity of the Virgin!

The people of Treves have special cause for joy.

But this feeling of exultation is common to us with all Christians; to-day is born Mary, whom all Catholics call their dearest Mother, and therefore they look on this day as a most glorious and happy one. But for you, O Christians of Treves! there is a new title, a special reason for rejoicing on this great festival. Nicetas describes how John Comnenus, an eastern emperor, after having long been attacked and conquered by the Tartars and Scythians, at last gained a victory over them and celebrated his triumph in the following manner. Besides many other costly preparations, he caused a chariot to be made of gold and silver, richly set with precious stones; a wonderful work it was, says Nicetas.² All the streets, palaces, and houses were hung

¹ *Quæ est ista quæ progreditur, quasi aurora consurgens, pulchra ut luna, electa ut sol?* —Cant. vi. 9.

² *Opus admirabile.*

with precious purple and carpets adorned with gold and silver; the triumphal chariot was drawn by four white horses amid the sound of musical instruments. For whom was it intended? The emperor caused the image of the Mother of God to be placed therein, to whose help and protection he ascribed the victory he had gained over his enemies.¹ He himself, accompanied by all the people, followed the chariot with great jubilation, all calling out everywhere in a loud voice: "Thou art the glory of our empire; thou art the honor of our people!"²

I am sure, my dear brethren, you see what I am coming to; otherwise I must refer you to your ancestors, and say in the words of the Prophet Moses: "Ask thy father, and he will declare to thee; thy elders, and they will tell thee."³ How great is your obligation to Mary for the benefits and the freedom you have received from her! They will remind you of the troublous times when you were groaning under the tyranny of foreigners, who, as you know, on this day took the city and ruled it with a rod of iron for two years. They will tell you how the clergy as well as the laity were so exhausted by the taxes they were forced to pay, that many in their desperation had to seek safety in flight, leaving house and home behind them. They will point to the places where stood many beautiful convents and churches that were wantonly burned or razed to the ground by the enemy. They will tell you how the cathedral was turned into a stable, and how the horses ate their forage off the high-altar; how the clergy and religious, the magistrates and the common people, children alone excepted, were forced to work hard like the Israelites in Egypt, and that so unmercifully, that an executioner stood by them with the sword in his hand, ready to cut down any one who ceased from working. They will tell you how a counsellor and a canon were dragged by the hair of the head to the gallows, because they had not brought together the prescribed number of laborers, and how they would have been hanged if their innocence had not been discovered and proved. They will tell you how everything in the city was plundered, and at last the archbishop's house itself; they will tell you that in those sorrowful and calamitous circumstances they had recourse to the Queen of heaven, as Moses had of old to the ark of the covenant in the

Because on this day they were saved from a great calamity by her intercession.

¹ Dei Genitricis imaginem in eo collocavit.

² Tu gloria imperii; tu honorificentia populi nostri!

³ Interroga patrem tuum, et annuntiabit tibi; majores tuos, et dicent tibi.—Deut. xxxiv. 7.

dangers of war: "And when the ark was lifted up, Moses said: Arise, O Lord, and let Thy enemies be scattered."¹ Arise, O Lady, was then the cry in Treves, and let the enemy be driven out of the city that is devoted to thee! They will tell you how they ascribed it to the intercession and protection of Mary that they were at last freed from slavery and the heavy burden of war, and how their enemies fled on this very day. Therefore was this feast instituted as a perpetual memorial of their gratitude for this benefit, and celebrated with a grand procession in which the image of their Advocate was carried in triumph, while they solemnly bound themselves and their descendants to celebrate the feast yearly as a sign of their thankfulness. "You shall call this day most solemn and most holy," they now call out to us from their graves by the example they have given us. "It shall be an everlasting ordinance in all your dwellings and generations."

On account of which they hold a grand procession to-day.

Meanwhile, as I see, you do not require this exhortation; for of your own accord, and animated by your own zeal, you help in the celebration of the feast. How many voices united in harmony, how many sweet strains of musical instruments have I not heard to-day during holy Mass! And it seems to me as if they were so many joyous congratulations addressed to Mary in heaven by the triumphant cry of the people: Thou art the glory of our city; thou art the honor of our people! So it is, sovereign Queen of heaven and earth! Such is the cry we mean to send forth to thee, both here in the church and on our way home, to our own great joy of heart and thy undying honor and glory! As long as any part of Treves remains standing, this day shall be one of the holiest, and shall be devoted to thanking and honoring thee. And we shall not only unite our voices in hymns and prayers to recommend ourselves anew to thy protection and motherly care, but, as thou desirest most of all from us, we shall unanimously resolve to devote ourselves completely to thy service and that of thy divine Son.

The whole city is recommended to Mary.

Thou knowest how thy servant, St. Stephen of Hungary, used to act. This holy king had in his chamber a picture of the Mother of God, to whom he had intrusted the care of his kingdom. He never granted an audience on any weighty matter of state, nor took counsel in his affairs concerning the government

¹ Cumque elevaretur arca, dicebat Moyses: Surge, Domine, et dissipentur inimici tui.—Num. x. 35.

of the country, before going into his room and recommending the success of the business to the Mother of God. There he would throw himself on his knees before her picture, laying his crown, sceptre, and purple at her feet, and prostrate on the ground make the following protestation: O Mary! it is the greatest honor for me to be thy footstool; thou art the Queen and sovereign ruler of my kingdom; it is entrusted to me only as thy steward to rule it in thy name. Help me then, and tell me what I have to do in order to govern thy people. Then he would resume the crown and sceptre as if he had been authorized by his sovereign Lady to wear them in her honor. So it is with us too, O most blessed Virgin! Such are and shall be our sentiments. We all publicly revere and acknowledge thee as our sovereign Queen and Lady; at thy feet on this day the greatest of the clergy and religious lay their mitres and croziers and the insignia of their rank; the magistrates lay at thy feet the keys of the city as a sign and proof of their submission to thee; the sodalities and confraternities devoted to thee lay their banners before thee, and all the people present prostrate themselves at thy feet. Each one in particular gives thee his own little world, that is, his body and soul, his life and death, so that he may be always devoted to thee after thy divine Son. Receive favorably, O great Queen, these offerings; small though they are, they are offered with good hearts, and say of us to thy Son what Isaias said of his people: "Behold I and my children whom the Lord hath given me,"¹ and who have devoted themselves altogether to my service; let not one of them be lost to me or ruined forever! And so keep us constantly under the shadow of thy motherly mantle. This is the earnest wish of us all, which we now make known to thee with joy of heart and childlike confidence. Amen.

TWENTY-NINTH SERMON.

**ON THE ZEAL OF MARY TO INCREASE IN GRACE IN HER
ENTRY INTO THE TEMPLE.**

Subject.

1. **Mary** was full of the grace of God, yet from the first dawn of reason she labored as carefully to preserve and increase it as if she had too little of it. 2. We often complain that we have

¹ Ecce ego et pueri mei, quos dedit mihi Dominus.—Is. viii. 18.

not grace enough, and yet we are as careless about preserving and increasing it as if we had too much.—*Preached on the feast of the Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary.*

Text.

Beatus venter quite portavit.—Luke xi. 27.

“Blessed is the womb that bore Thee.”

Introduction.

To bear and bring forth the eternal Son of God is one of the most stupendous and excellent graces that can be conferred on any creature. O Mary, virgin and mother! thou art the only chosen one on whom God bestowed this precious grace, and as a necessary consequence of it, thou art the only one in whom, as is becoming the Mother of God, all the other graces and gifts of the Almighty are collected together like the waters in the fathomless ocean. With reason then did that woman in the gospel say of thee to Christ thy Son: “Blessed is the womb that bore Thee.” My dear brethren, when on to-day I congratulate the Mother of God, who is our Mother too, on her wonderful graces, and at the same time consider the life she led from her childhood, I find a circumstance that I cannot sufficiently admire, namely, that this privileged Virgin should labor so hard to win new graces from God; for when she was but three years old she went to the temple, to devote herself body and soul to God and His service, and to think of and care for nothing but how she might make herself more pleasing to Him. But when I turn my thoughts to myself and others like me, I find something which is perhaps more astonishing, for I sometimes think I have so little grace, and yet I am so slovenly in working to get more. To compare these two points shall be the object of this sermon, which shall be also a panegyric on the Blessed Virgin. To make it clearer, I repeat,

Plan of Discourse.

Mary was full of the grace of God, and yet from the first dawn of reason she labored carefully to preserve and increase it, as if she had too little of it: the first part. We often complain that we have too little grace, and yet we are as careless about increasing and preserving it as if we had too much: the second part. The first is to the honor and glory of this Virgin; the second to

our instruction, that after her example we may work most diligently with the graces given us.

O Mary, Mother of the divine gifts! that we may learn this of thee, grant us by the hands of the angels thy servants some of those graces that thou dost possess in such abundance! To that end we repeat the praise bestowed on thee to thy honor and that of thy divine Son: “Blessed is the womb that bore Thee.”

Many often hear divine grace preached and spoken of, and they do not understand what they hear; many pray for grace, and do not know what they ask for. To understand then our subject, you must know that the grace of God is of two kinds that are quite distinct from each other. The one is called sanctifying grace, the other actual or helping grace. Of the first St. Paul says to the Romans: “Being justified freely by His grace.”¹ It is like a seal impressed on the soul, by which man is made just, holy, a friend and a child of God; it is like a precious and beautiful garment that adorns the soul, makes it pleasing in the sight of God, and attracts His special love. When once we have this grace, it remains with us always, even while we are eating, drinking, sleeping, and not thinking about it; it cannot be lost unless by the commission of mortal sin, and is again recovered when one does true penance. This grace makes all our works, if they are performed with a good intention, meritorious and deserving of heaven. The greater it is in the soul, the more pleasing to God does the soul become, and the more meritorious are its works. It is increased by every good work performed with a supernatural intention in the state of grace. He who brings this grace with him into eternity after death has a claim to the glory of heaven as his due inheritance, and according to the measure of this grace in him, so also shall be the greatness of his eternal glory. He who dies without this grace shall, as an object of the divine hatred, either be simply excluded from heaven, as is the case with little children who die without baptism, or be condemned to the pains of hell, as shall happen to all who have lost this grace by mortal sin and have not repented before death.

What sanctifying grace is.

Actual or helping grace is that of which the same St. Paul says: “By the grace of God I am what I am; and His grace in me hath not been void, but I have labored more abundantly than all they; yet not I, but the grace of God with me.”² It is that by

What actual grace is: shown by a simile.

¹ *Justificati gratis per gratiam ipsius.*—Rom. iii. 24.

² *Gratia Dei sum id quod sum; et gratia ejus in me vacua non fuit; sed abundantius illis omnibus laboravi; non ego autem, sed gratia Dei mecum.*—I. Cor. xv. 10.

which God helps and strengthens us to do good and avoid evil; and it is so necessary to us, on account of the condition of our nature, that without it we cannot perform any good, supernatural work; it is so necessary, on account of our inborn weakness and evil inclinations, that without it we cannot keep for any long time from sin, especially when we are grievously tempted. I shall explain myself by a simile that every one will easily understand: A child one and a half or two years old is standing at a bench; the mother, sitting a little distance off, calls out to it and stretches out her hands inviting it to come to her; the child is anxious to come, but it cannot go so far alone; it has feet to walk with, but they are too weak as yet, and if it tried to take two or three steps it would tumble down at once. What does the mother do? She either takes the child by the hand, or else supports it by a band under its arms, and so leads it along; or else she puts it into a little cart with wheels, so that it can push itself along from one place to another. Now the child can walk, but how? It must itself move its feet; if it became stubborn and refused to move, all the means given to enable it to walk would not help in the least; it would remain standing or sitting. Why is it able now to walk without falling? It could not do so by itself, but must be helped by the band, the cart, or the mother's hand. There you have a picture of the state in which we are, incapable of good of ourselves, and at the same time an image of the power of the actual grace of God. What the child is with regard to walking alone, that are we with regard to supernatural good works; what the mother's hand is to the child, that to us is the actual grace by which God forestalls and strengthens us; otherwise we should not be able to do the least good work. This grace consists partly in the supernatural enlightenment of the mind, and the inspiration which helps us to know good and evil; and partly in the impulse given our will, by which God softly and gently draws us on to do good and avoid evil. The clearer this enlightenment, the stronger this impulse, the greater and more powerful is the actual grace; and with so much the less difficulty and greater pleasure do we keep from sin and do good. This grace does not remain always with us, as we know by experience, when we are asleep, or engaged in distracting household occupations, in which we do not always form good thoughts; but God gives it generously, according to opportunity and to our capability and disposition; so that it is in our power to accept

or reject it; to work with it, or not. This grace we do not lose by sin, although we make ourselves unworthy of receiving it so often and so copiously from God. And there is not a sinner in the world who does not now and then receive enough of it to enable him to be converted and to return to God. It is this actual grace we generally ask from God in our prayers, that the good Lord may bestow it on us in greater abundance and with greater power, so that we may avoid sin, live piously, and so preserve and increase sanctifying grace.

Now to our subject. Mary is full of grace, as the angel said to her; full of sanctifying grace; full of actual grace. As for sanctifying grace, not only did she bring it with her into the world at her birth, like St. John the Baptist; but she had it in the first moment of her conception, and that in such perfection that the Holy Ghost Himself found among all mere creatures none on whom He could, so to speak, look with such pleasure as on Mary. "One is my dove," He says in the Canticle, "my perfect one is but one."¹ In so high a degree of perfection did she possess that grace that the angels asked each other in wonderment: "Who is she that cometh forth as the morning rising, fair as the moon, bright as the sun?"² In such abundance did she possess it that the holy Fathers unanimously acknowledge their inability to understand it, and confess that she is above their comprehension, almost as if she were an infinite being. "She is more holy than the seraphim," says St. Ephrem, "more holy than the cherubim, and beyond all comparison more glorious than all the other heavenly hosts."³ St. Chrysostom excludes not only the angels, but all created things from any comparison with the Blessed Virgin: "Nothing more full of grace, nothing more holy than thou."⁴ St. Jerome puts together the holiness of all creatures, and yet says that that of Mary surpasses them all: "To others," he says, "grace is given as it were in parts; but the plenitude of grace is infused into Mary."⁵ Do you wish to know the measure of her grace? Then hear how she herself describes it: "He that is mighty hath done

Mary is full of sanctifying grace.

¹ Una est columba mea, perfecta mea una est.—Cant. vi. 8.

² Quæ est ista quæ progreditur quasi aurora consurgens, pulchra ut luna, electa ut sol?—Ibid. 9.

³ Sanctior Seraphim, sanctior Cherubim, et nulla comparatione cæteris est omnibus superioris exercitibus gloriosior.

⁴ Nihil te gratiosius, nihil sanctius.—S. Chrys. Serm. de Nativ.

⁵ Cæteris per partes præstatur, Mariæ tota se infudit gratiæ plenitudo.—S. Hieron. Serm. de Assump.

great things to me: He hath showed might in His arm."¹ That is, as the learned Suarez says, the measure of her graces is the omnipotence of God Himself.² Just then as the divine power is without bounds, end, or limit, so also is the grace of Mary and her holiness without end, bounds, or limit, and she yields to no one but to her Creator alone; therefore the same theologian concludes that "God loves this Virgin more than He does all the other saints put together."³ Now if the greatness of the merit of her works is to be measured by the greatness of the grace in her soul, what a wonderful value, what a high and incomprehensible merit must not have attached to the works that Mary did with such a plenitude of grace!

And of actual grace too, so that, humanly speaking, she could not sin.

And if God bestows His gifts and actual graces according to the measure of the love He has for a soul, it follows also that Mary must have had a great abundance of actual graces as well. Truly the Lord God was bound to have a greater care of this soul than of all His other creatures, for it is His dearest creature, the masterpiece of His hands, the chief object of His generosity. That we poor men are so difficult to be moved to good, so easily led into sin, and so ready to resist the grace of God, comes partly from the deordination of our desires and passions, which are the unhappy consequences of the sin we inherit from Adam: and these are called by theologians "the fuel of sin."⁴ And St. Paul complains of it, saying that it always fights against the law of the spirit and of reason; partly it comes from the many occasions and objects that tempt us to sin and surround us on all sides. Now neither of these was the case with Mary, on account of her extraordinary grace. She had not the fuel of sin, the inclination to evil, because she was always free from original sin; nor the outward occasions, because the watchful eye of Divine Providence kept everything far from her that could in the least interfere with her holiness. These extraordinary graces and special divinē helps, as well as the countless actual graces that were always at her call, placed her in the moral impossibility of committing the slightest fault.

And she could have lived at her ease.

Mother of the Most High! behold the abundant riches, the fullness of graces with which thy Creator and thy Son has endowed thee, and distinguished thee above all His other creatures! What

¹ Fecit mihi magna qui potens est. Fecit potentiam in brachio suo.—Luke i. 49, 51.

² Mensura privilegiorum Virginis est potentia Dei.

³ Deus plus amat solam Virginem, quam reliquos sanctos omnes.

⁴ Fomes peccati.

just reason thou hast to rejoice! At least what a good opportunity thou hast for leading a quiet and an easy life! Considering this great treasure of gifts and graces, another might think or say with the rich man in the gospel, speaking of the abundance of his harvest: "Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thy rest."¹ Why should you trouble yourself? take your ease. You can have a quiet time of it; you have enough; you need not fear danger or misfortune; rest, my soul! So, I say, might another have thought in similar circumstances.

But this is not the idea we must form of the zeal of Mary. Speaking of Our Lord, St. Paul says: "Who being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God; but emptied Himself, taking the form of a servant, being made in the likeness of men. He humbled Himself, becoming obedient unto death."² And of Mary the Mother of God we can say with wonderment, that she thought it not robbery to be esteemed by God above all other creatures, and to be enriched with the fullness of grace; yet she did not absolve herself from the labor and toil to which all others are condemned after sin; she humbled herself, taking the form of a handmaid. The more she experienced the divine generosity, the more generous did she show herself to God; the higher she was exalted above others, the more did she humble herself in her own eyes; the more assured she knew herself to be of the greatest eternal glory, the more carefully did she work for it; the more she beheld herself filled with grace, the more zealously did she labor to preserve and increase it.

Yet she labored hard to increase in grace.

The holy Fathers, whose thoughts in divine things flew far higher than ours, when they speak of Mary's entering the temple and of her subsequent life, can hardly find words enough to describe and explain the number and perfection of the unceasing good works with which she was occupied day and night in her efforts to increase sanctifying grace and merit in her soul. It seems wicked to think that she was ever even for a moment idle, sleepy, or careless. St. Bernard says: "Far be it from us to suspect her of anything like tepidity, or to attribute to her anything but the utmost fervor."³ Nor do they except even the time she

Proved from the holy Fathers.

¹ Anima, habes multa bona posita in annos plurimos; requiesce.—Luke xii. 19.

² Qui cum in forma Dei esset, non rapinam arbitratus est esse se equalem Deo; sed semetipsum exinanivit, formam servi accipiens, in similitudinem hominum factus. Humillavit semetipsum, factus obediens usque ad mortem.—Philipp. ii. 6-8.

³ Nihil in ea tepidum, aut non ferventissimum liceat suspicari.

devoted to sleep; a time when the minds of others are darkened and as it were buried by slumber; for during her sleep her heart was always watching with God. They do not except even the years of childhood, when the use of reason is trammelled; for even in the cradle Mary had her freedom, and always spent her time in the great affair of her salvation. Nay, they do not even except the nine months she passed in her mother's womb; before she opened her eyes to the light of the world her mind was fully enlightened with reason; it was sunk in God, and occupied with the most perfect acts of charity and other virtues to the increase of sanctifying grace. "She was capable of devotion," says St. Ambrose, "before being able to work in the ordinary way of nature."¹ Nay, what is more to be wondered at, that soul so full of grace, so specially protected by God, free from all inordinate desires, and as it were incapable of sin, was yet so careful and guarded in all her actions as if she had the same weakness to contend with as we have; as if she were in constant fear and danger of losing grace and her soul. I cannot read without shame the sketch given of her life by St. Ambrose; he cannot understand her continual fasts, as if her flesh were rebellious and required to be tamed: "Why," he says, "should I go on to speak of her abstemiousness in eating, of her uninterrupted fasts?"² He cannot understand her reserve in speaking,³ as if she were afraid to commit a fault of the tongue; nor her unceasing diligence,⁴ as if idleness would have been dangerous to her soul; nor her modesty and love of retirement,⁵ as if the society of others would have been dangerous to her virtue; nor the carefulness that prevented her from going alone even to the temple,⁶ as if she could not look after herself sufficiently. O Mary full of grace! most blessed Virgin! what need hadst thou in the superabundance of thy riches and heavenly treasures to practise such carefulness and severity to thyself, and to labor and toil so hard? Leave that to others; it is suitable for us poor mortals, who are subject to a thousand dangers and weaknesses, and are not safe from a fall for a moment. Ah, thou hast wished to put to shame our carelessness, laziness, and tepidity in preserving the grace of God and in working with it to save our souls! Truly, concludes

¹ Prius devotionis compos quam naturæ.—S. Amb. L. 2. de Virgin. C. 2.

² Quid exequar ciborum parsimoniam, congemiuatos jejunió dies?

³ Loquendi parcor.

⁴ Intenta operi.

⁵ Proditre domo nesca.

⁶ Ne ad templum quidem sine custode.

St. Ambrose, that was thy object! She wished to instruct posterity what to do, to avoid, to care for, in order to preserve sanctifying grace.¹ How is it with us in this particular, my dear brethren? I seem to hear one complaint after another; we have too little grace, and yet we are very careless of preserving it; as we shall see in the

Second Part.

Ah, we think, why should we wonder at the Mother of God and other saints being so faithful, zealous, and holy in the divine service and in the practice of virtue? If I had the same graces as they I would be different to what I am; but that is wanting to me. God has showed Himself extraordinarily generous to them, towards me He is rather sparing of His gifts; over them He has poured out the whole torrent of graces and gifts, to me He has given but a few drops; to them He stretches forth His almighty arm, to me He gives only the tip of His finger from a distance. He knows my weakness, the many temptations, allurements to sin, and dangerous occasions in which I must live; and yet the help and grace He gives me is small. It seems as if He has abandoned me to my misery, to my violent desires and evil inclinations; hence it comes that I fall so often into sin. These and similar thoughts run through our heads when the examples of the saints are proposed to us. They were holy people, we say; what wonder is it that with all the graces they received they reached such a pitch of perfection and sanctity? As if God were to blame for people not being holy and pious! Nay, what is still more fearful to say, as if He were a hard, cruel, and merciless God, as that servant in the gospel who hid his talent in the ground said to his master: "I know that thou art a hard man; thou reapest where thou hast not sown, and gatherest where thou hast not strewed."² As if the Lord God expected from our souls the fruits of holiness without giving them the helping rain of His graces! Thus, as St. Bernard says, "we all complain that we have not grace enough."³

Unjust, blasphemous complaints! Of whom and what do you complain? You say God does not give you grace enough to lead a holy life. That is not true, and is an error condemned by the

Complaint that we have not enough grace.

God is not bound to give us any.

¹ Quid corrigere, quid fugere, quid tenere debeatis.

² Scio quia homo durus es; metis ubi non seminasti, et congregas ubi non parasti. —Matt. xxv. 24.

³ Omnes nobis causamur deesse gratiam.

Church. He does not give you such graces and in such quantity as He gave to the Mother of God and other saints; that is true and just; but have you any reason to complain therefore? He gives His grace to you very sparingly and in small measure? That I will grant you for the moment, but I do not by any means agree with it altogether. But will you and can you complain on that account? Who are you, to lay down the law for God in the distribution of His graces? Does He owe you anything? And on what title? Can He not, as the highest, uncontrolled, and most independent Lord of all, give, take away, distribute what, to whom, when, and how He pleases? "O man," cries out St. Paul, "who art thou that repleiest against God?"¹ You are the work of the hands of God, like the vessel in the hands of the potter: "Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it: Why hast thou made me thus?"² Must the earthen vessel ask the master who made it why he gave it such a shape, and made it so large, so small, so narrow, so wide, so high, so low? "Hath not the potter power over the clay?"³ Can he not make of it what he will? Who would dare to complain of an earthly sovereign using his power according to his will? One receives a great favor, the other nothing at all; one is raised to a high dignity, the other deposed; one is preferred to all, the other completely disregarded. Why? Because the sovereign so wills it; he has his own reasons for so doing, and every one must give him credit for acting aright. No one would ever venture to say that he acts unjustly; and if our thoughts were known to him, no one would dare to think it. And God, who knows the heart, whose justice is infinite, who can wrong no one, God must hear our murmurs and complainings, and submit as it were to be called to account by us for giving more grace to one and less to another? for having given more to Abel than to Cain; less to Esau than to Jacob; less to every one of us than to His dear Mother Mary and other saints? If He has been more generous to them, can He be therefore accused of injustice? "Is thy eye evil because I am good? Take what is thine, and go thy way."⁴

Yet He gives them plentifully.

Yet, to make this matter clearer, let us consider the first complaint again: God gives me grace in small quantities and sparingly.

¹ O homo, tu quis es, qui respondeas Deo?—Rom. ix. 20.

² Numquid dicit figmentum ei qui se finxit: quid me fecisti sic?—Ibid.

³ An non habet potestatem figulus luti?—Ibid. 21.

⁴ An oculus tuus nequam est quia ego bonus sum? Tolle quod tuum est, et vade.—Matt. xx. 15, 14.

ly. I granted this to you for the moment already; now I mean to show you that it is false too. What! Catholic Christian in a Catholic country, dare you maintain that? Reflect for a moment on the goodness of God to you during your whole life. First, He has infused sanctifying grace into your soul in holy baptism in preference to so many thousands of heathens, Turks, Jews, and still-born children who never received that sacrament, although you did not deserve it any more than they. He preserved this grace in you till you came to the use of reason; from that moment it lay in your own power to increase and add to it by all kinds of good works daily, hourly, and every moment. To that end He gave you the holy sacraments that you might receive them as often as you wish, and rise higher in grace by the use of them, opportunities that are not granted in other remote parts of the world; so that it lay in your power to amass a great treasure of grace or not. Again, as far as the help of actual grace is concerned, can you say that you have ever suffered from the want of it? If you did, you would be convicted of falsehood by the many inward inspirations that you have felt and still feel to lead a better life; by the hints and good suggestions given you to shun that dangerous occasion; by the sudden inclination to do or omit this or that. What else are all these but graces impelling to holiness, given you by God without any wish or desire for them on your part, nay, often against your wish; and He compels you, as it were, to accept them, as St. Bernard says: "God gives His grace even when we do not ask for it, nay, when we fight against it and reject it."¹ By how many different figures has not God given you an idea of His generosity? He shows Himself as your Father with a loving countenance; He points to the heavens above to encourage you; He has offered you the crown of the exceeding glory of the elect to attract you by the hope and desire of it; like a judge filled with indignation He has opened hell under your feet; He has disquieted you by your own conscience whenever you sinned; He has caused His thunder to resound in your ears; He has placed before your eyes so many public and private calamities and misfortunes, the loss of goods, poverty, sickness, sudden and unforeseen death in others. What else are all these but graces of God by which He wishes to frighten you, to bring you to the knowledge of the falsity and vanity of the world and its goods, of the uncertainty of the hour of

¹ Non petentibus, sed impotentibus, sed repellentibus Deus gratiam impertitur.

death, of the shame and danger of the state of sin in which you are, so as to drag you as it were by force out of it?

And also opportunities of doing good.

What fine opportunities of doing good you have if you only wish to make use of them! How many examples of good and pious Christians to shine before you! How many exhortations, instructions, and sermons in all the churches, in which the gravity of sin, the absolute necessity of working out our salvation with all possible diligence, and the manner of practising the Christian virtues are explained and set before you! The light of the true faith has shone upon you, while so many millions of infidels are left in darkness. This light shows you a God who became man for you, a poor God, a humble God, a suffering and crucified God; it holds Him forth as the Pattern and Model of your life, and at the same time as a strict Judge after death, who will punish you unless your actions are conformable with His. Besides all this He has given you prayer as a sure means of obtaining each and every grace; you may pray and make known your wants to Him, when, where, as often and as long as you will. This Lord gives audience to all, everywhere, and at all times; He Himself tells you that all you have to do is to come and ask: "Ask," He says, "and you shall receive."¹ "All things whatsoever you shall ask in prayer believing, you shall receive."² If no door were open to you but this free access to God, would not it alone suffice? And you complain that He is parsimonious in your regard? That you have too little grace?

And yet we are so careless of increasing grace.

Ah, complain of and condemn rather your own sloth and laziness in working with the graces given you to preserve and increase them. It is you who are niggardly and miserly towards the generous God, and that along with the injustice of your complaint is a great ingratitude. You think you have too little grace; and yet you deal with what you have as carelessly as if you had too much of it, and that is a great folly. What has become of the sanctifying grace you received in baptism? Have you kept it uninjured in your soul till the present time? By how many degrees is it increased during the last ten, twenty, thirty, forty, fifty years? Look at the tepid life you have been leading hitherto; perhaps you will find but a very slight increase; nay, what am I saying about increase? Perhaps you have squandered this precious inheritance received from God, and spent it among

¹ *Petite et accipietis.*— John xvi. 24.

² *Omnia quæcunque petieritis in oratione credentes, accipietis.*— Matt. xxi. 22.

swine, like the prodigal son who said to his father: "Father, give me the portion of substance that falleth to me."¹ How often have you not bartered it for a dollar of gain, for the pleasure of an hour, for a momentary gratification, or to please some mortal man? How often have you not exposed it to the danger of loss in the occasion of sin? You have attached as little importance to it as if it were of no value to you. And what have you done with the actual graces given you? I am afraid not much good! The most of the good inspirations sent you were neglected. The voice of God inviting, threatening, promising, has hardly found a hearing with you. The talents and gifts bestowed on you have been buried and rendered useless like the talent the faithless servant hid in the ground. You seldom made your appearance at sermons and exhortations for fear of having your conscience disturbed; or if you did come, you have not practised the truths you heard. You have profited little by the example of the pious, of the saints, of that Model of our life on earth, the living and suffering God and Saviour Himself. You have ridiculed the piety and modesty of others as simplicity, instead of following the brilliant example they gave you. You have omitted your prayers, or said them carelessly through fear of being heard, and of being obliged in future to restrain more vigorously your evil inclinations, to overcome yourself with greater violence, to shun your accustomed vices and occasions, and to give a better example to others. See, it is not God, but you yourself that are to blame; it is not the want of grace, but the want of co-operation on your part, that is the cause of the poverty of your soul, of your being so strongly inclined to evil, so weak in falling, so deficient in piety and holiness; in a word, you are to blame for not being full of grace!

Do you still dare to complain and to throw the blame on the almighty God? Do you still think about those great and extraordinary graces that have been bestowed on zealous servants of God, and dare to hope for and expect them? But why? What right or title have you to ask them from God? Perhaps because the many graces He has given you already have been of little use to you, because you have despised and rejected them? That is a nice way to prepare for fresh favors and gifts! In what part of the world have you heard that the contempt of one benefit is the best manner of making sure of another? Quite

And hence
God justly
withholds
many
graces from
us.

¹ Da mihi portionem substantiæ quæ me contingit.—Luke xv. 12.

the contrary. He who proves ungrateful for the first benefit is unworthy of the second, and is generally deprived of the first. If a farmer leaves his land untilled it is taken from him, and given to another who is more diligent, and this is the true sense of the words in the Gospel of St. Matthew, words that should strike terror into the heart of the tepid Christian: "He that hath not, from him shall be taken away that also which he hath;"¹ that is, he who has received a little and made a bad use of it shall be deprived of what was given him. This is the meaning of that other threat in the same gospel: "I say to you that the kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and shall be given to a nation yielding the fruits thereof."² Not only that; but the neglected graces shall serve as witnesses against you to your greater shame and deeper damnation: "Wo to thee, Corozain! wo to thee, Bethsaida: for if in Tyre and Sidon had been wrought the miracles that have been wrought in you, they had long ago done penance in sackcloth and ashes."³ Wo to thee, O Christian! wo to thee, O Catholic, who in the clear light and with an abundance of graces takest so little trouble about thy salvation! If these gifts, if the half, the quarter of them had been given to heathens, Turks, heretics, and sinners, they would have been converted and have served God with great zeal. It will be much easier for them than for you on the last day: "It shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon in the day of judgment, than for you."⁴ "The men of Ninive shall rise in judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it,"⁵ because they were converted by one sermon of Jonas. No, O tepid Christian! they who shall put you to shame and condemn you shall not be the Mother of God full of grace, nor the apostles and great saints; they shall be the Ninivites, who were before corrupted and sunk in vice, and who at the mere word of Jonas entered into themselves and did penance; they shall be the public sinners who heard the exhortations of John the Baptist, and amended their lives; there shall be millions and millions of lost souls in hell who would have gained heaven if they had had the lights, the

¹ Qui non habet, et quod habet auferetur ab eo.—Matt. xiii. 12.

² Dico vobis quia auferetur a vobis regnum Dei, et dabitur genti facienti fructus ejus.—Ibid. xxi. 43.

³ Vae tibi Corozain, vae tibi Bethsaida: quia si in Tyro et Sidone factæ essent virtutes, quæ factæ sunt in vobis, olim in cilicio et cinere poenitentiam egissent.—Ibid. xi. 21.

⁴ Tyro et Sidoni remissus erit in die iudicii, quam vobis.—Ibid. 22.

⁵ Viri Ninivite surgent in iudicio cum generatione ista, et condemnabunt eam.—Ibid. xii. 41.

inspirations, the opportunities of good, the graces that you despised; they shall rise up and condemn you.

Ah, my dear brethren, let us not peer too closely into the designs of the Almighty, and complain that He has given us too little and others too much. Let us rather learn from the example of the Mother of God to make a good use of the graces we have received, and to work with them with all possible diligence. Such great perfection and holiness are not required from us as from Mary the Mother of God; it is enough for us if we do what we can, and show our zeal according to the measure and proportion of the graces given us. The servant who had two talents and gained two more got the same reward and heard the same words as he who had five talents and gained other five: "Well done, good and faithful servant: because thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will place thee over many things; enter thou into the joy of thy lord."¹ There is no grace so small as not to be increased by your diligence; no grace so weak that by it our zeal cannot preserve sanctifying grace; no grace so great that our prayers may not obtain it from God. It is but too true, O my God! I have no reason to complain of parsimony to me on Thy part; Thou rather hast reason enough to complain of my ingratitude in abusing Thy generosity. Alas, what answer shall I make Thee when Thou wilt call me to account for the many talents, gifts, and graces that Thou hast bestowed so abundantly on me in preference to many others, and which I have abused and rejected in such a useless, careless, vain, and wicked manner? When Thou wilt call me to account for all the inspirations, exhortations, knowledge, means, and opportunities of good that I have failed to profit by? What shall I say when Thou wilt show me the degree of sanctifying grace that I might and should have gained? Ah, I am that prodigal son who have often squandered it for some wretched thing! I dare not any more demand my portion from Thee; I am no longer worthy to be called Thy child; I must regard myself as the meanest of Thy servants, to whom Thou art not bound to give any more grace, and whose sole hope is in Thy mercy! In this alone then will I trust, and like a beggar stand at Thy door until Thou givest me gratuitously an alms of Thy grace, that I may amend my sinful life and become more diligent in working out my salvation. I

Exhortation and resolve in future to work zealously with grace after Mary's example.

¹ Euge, serve bone et fidelis, quia super pauca fuisti fidelis, super multa te constituam: intra in gaudium Domini tui.—Matt. xxv. 23.

will go to that Virgin whom Thou hast appointed to be the dispensatrix of Thy graces, and who is full of grace; her I will honor, love, and invoke, that by her intercession I may again obtain grace, daily increase it, and constantly preserve it. Amen.

THIRTIETH SERMON.

ON THE HUMILITY OF MARY IN THE ANNUNCIATION.

Subject.

1. The humility of Mary is wonderful on account of her great excellence. 2. The number of the humble is small nowadays, although humility is necessary to enter heaven.—*Preached on the feast of the Annunciation of the Blessed Virgin Mary.*

Text.

Ecce ancilla Domini.—Luke i. 38.
 “Behold the handmaid of the Lord.”

Introduction.

What was the reason of the great fear that, as we read in today’s gospel, Mary experienced when the angel addressed her? What could she have to fear, a virgin like her, so pure, so holy, so united with God? And indeed the message brought her was a very joyful one, desirable to the whole world! Some are of the opinion that the angel Gabriel appeared in such splendor and majesty that she was disturbed and frightened at it; but according to the teaching of the holy Fathers, it was nothing new for Mary to communicate with the angels and to enjoy their company; and of course what we are accustomed to is not apt to disturb us. St. Ambrose is of the opinion that she was frightened because the angel entered her room in the guise of a man: “The Virgin,” he says, “was disturbed, as if she beheld a man before her.”¹ Therefore he adds: a virgin should be known by her modesty, by her reserve, by her bashfulness, which causes her to be disquieted at the least shadow of anything like light conduct. The ancient Origen, St. Chrysostom, and many others attribute her fear to her great humility; for she saw that great

¹ *Virgo, quasi viri specie mota, trepidavit.*

prince of heaven bowing down before her with reverence, and heard him address her by most honorable titles; that honor, they say, quite disturbed her; for she thought to herself: how can such praise, honor, and reverence be given to such a mean creature as I am? This opinion, my dear brethren, pleases me better than any of the others; for as a proud man is shocked when humbled, so the humble man is frightened when praised. And this humility of Mary is confirmed by her own words, by which she gave herself out as a lowly servant: "Behold the handmaid of the Lord." A wonderful humility in one so great and excellent! A virtue that we mortals ought to, nay, must imitate. These two points shall form the matter of this instruction, which shall also be a panegyric on Mary.

Plan of Discourse.

In the first part I shall show briefly how great is the humility of Mary; in the second part how few there are nowadays who imitate Mary's humility, although, as I shall prove, humility is most necessary to all, to the laity as well as the clergy, not only that we may become children of Mary, but that we may enter heaven.

Do thou, O Queen of heaven, handmaid of the Lord, the greatest of mothers, and at the same time the lowliest in thine own eyes, most humble Mary! do thou obtain for us from thy divine Son that we may learn from thee to be truly humble of heart! This we ask of you too, holy angels!

It is not unusual for one who is really bad to acknowledge himself as such. For one who is miserable, frail, and poor, to say that he is miserable, frail, and poor is not very wonderful. When he who has no good or praiseworthy quality humbles himself, his cannot be called true humility. Hence no one is surprised to see a beggar throw himself on the ground, ask for an alms on bended knee, and shout out aloud his declaration of being poor, hungry, and sick. No one is surprised to see the servant-maid cleaning out the stable, or the house servant polishing his master's boots. No one would dream of saying: that is a humble beggar, a humble maid or man-servant. But on the other hand, if a great lord, who is high in dignity and honor, endowed with many great natural gifts, exalted to a distinguished position, and honored by all on account of his worth, if he were

Humility is wonderful in a high position.

to hold such a lowly opinion of himself, or to condescend to such mean tasks, that would indeed be something rare; then would all have reason to look on him as a wonderful and unheard-of example of humility, according to the words of St. Bernard: "It is not a great matter to be humble in lowly circumstances; but it is a great and a rare virtue to be humble in a high station;"¹ wonderful is it to see humility in the purple, humility on the throne.

Mary is the
greatest of
all mere
creatures.

Now, my dear brethren, if that is the case, I shall let him judge of the humility of Mary to whom the greatness, dignity, gifts, and graces of Mary are even slightly known. "Behold," says that exalted person, "behold the handmaid of the Lord." What dost thou say, Mary, most wise, prudent, and gifted Virgin? A handmaid! Is that what thou art? According to the testimony of the angel thou art endowed and filled with the grace and favor of God. A handmaid! By whom, with whom, in whom the sovereign Lord resides? A handmaid! Who of all the children of Adam has alone known how to touch the heart of the great God; who is blessed and chosen among all women, nay, among all mere creatures? Even now while thou callest thyself a handmaid, thou hast as thy spouse the Holy Ghost Himself, who has overshadowed thee: "The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Most High shall overshadow thee."² In the same moment thou shalt be the Mother of the Son of the supreme God; thou shalt bring forth Him whom the Father has generated from all eternity: "The Holy which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God."³ Thy Creator Himself shall be subject to thee; and yet thou sayest thou art only a poor handmaid of the Lord! A mother is more than a servant, a spouse more than a handmaid! Thou art she of whom the prophets long ago foretold that thou shouldst bring salvation to the world. Thou art she whom the holy Fathers and the whole Church call the sovereign Lady of all mere created things, to whom after God everything in heaven and on earth is subject and obedient. Thou art she before whom earthly sovereigns bow their crowned heads even to the dust, to whom the keys of so many towns are offered, to whom whole countries and kingdoms consecrate and devote themselves

¹ Non magnum est esse humilem in abjectione; magna prorsus et rara virtus, humilitas honorata.—S. Bern. Hom. super Missus.

² Spiritus Sanctus superveniet in te, et virtus Altissimi obumbrabit tibi.—Luke 1. 35.

³ Quod nascetur ex te Sanctum, vocabitur Filius Dei.—Ibid.

by oath as thy servants. Thou art she whom the very princes of heaven venerate as their lawful Queen. Thou art the most beautiful, holy, and perfect of all the creatures that God has made or will make; in a word, thy God alone excepted, thou art the highest in heaven and on earth.

And in spite of all that, art thou only a servant, a handmaid? ^{And yet the most humble.} Yes, truly, she answers: "Behold the handmaid of the Lord." And indeed in her own eyes she is the lowliest and most submissive of handmaids. What shall I say to this? I can only cry out with St. Ambrose: "Let him who has the mind to appreciate it see what an example of humility; she who is chosen as the Mother of the Lord calls herself His handmaid."¹ "What sublime humility is this," cries out St. Bernard in astonishment, "which is not made proud by honors, nor inflated by glory?"² If the same were shown by a notorious sinner like Magdalene, or the woman taken in adultery, or an abject, sinful, and poorly gifted daughter of Adam, it would not be so wonderful; but that one should have such a vile and lowly opinion of herself in her heart who is so highly exalted by God as a virgin richly endowed, a beloved daughter, a cherished spouse, a mother of God, and who is therefore, according to the testimony of St. Thomas of Aquin, of almost godlike and infinite dignity; that is a most rare and incomprehensible humility; "what sublime humility is this?"

Was the like of it ever heard of or seen before Mary's time? ^{Although no one had ever given her an example of such humility.} Where did this most humble Virgin find an example of such self-abjection? She had not yet seen Jesus her almighty Son, nor how He emptied Himself, and humbled Himself so far as to take the form of a servant and obedient subject; otherwise we might easily guess the cause of such great humiliation on her part. But she had on the contrary countless examples of pride and ambition in heaven and on earth. In the beginning at the creation of the world Lucifer remarked his own great beauty and the dignity that raised him above the other creatures made by God, although he was still far from possessing the excellence of Mary; and behold he at once became puffed up by pride, and, influenced by a vain self-complacency, he tried to exalt himself above the throne of God: "Thy heart was lifted up by thy

¹ Vide humilitatem; ancillam se dicit Domini, quæ Mater eligitur!—S. Amb. L. c. in c. 2. Luc.

² Quæ est hæc tam sublimis humilitas, quæ cedere non novit honoribus, insolescere gloria nescit?

beauty.”¹ Not long after in Paradise Eve was seduced by the spirit of lies; “You shall be as gods,”² said he, and behold Eve with Adam, influenced by an ambitious desire of this dignity, transgressed the divine command. After that time different men, like Nabuchodonosor, Antiochus, and others, saw themselves exalted above the common people and surrounded by wealth, power, glory, and honor; and therefore, puffed up by pride, they gave themselves out as gods. Mary, without any example to follow; Mary, who was the most beautiful and glorious of creatures, endowed with the most excellent gifts and far exalted above all others, did not however become proud nor puffed up on account of her great honors; but all the more impressed with the sense of her own nothingness, which she knew she had of herself, thought herself to be nothing more than the lowliest of the servants of the Lord. She was chosen as the Mother of God, and knew that she would, so to speak, be raised to the rank of a divinity, that she would have God as Father, God as Spouse, God as Son; nevertheless she calls herself a handmaid. O humility! one can say no more.

Through this humility, which she practised all her life, she was chosen to be the Mother of God.

That was the virtue which afterwards impelled her to go over the mountains to St. Elizabeth, to be a servant, not only to the Lord God, but even to people who were far beneath her. That was the virtue which forced her into the temple in order to be purified, as if she were an ordinary woman and a sinner. That was the virtue which she practised her whole life, so that, according to the testimony of the Fathers, it is the same thing to say Mary and the humble Virgin. That is especially the virtue by which she moved the Almighty to regard her with such love, favor, and affection (since it is not the high mountains, but the lowly valleys that are filled with water) that it drew down the Son of God from heaven to take up His dwelling in her womb. For why did Mary become the Mother of God? Tell us, incomparable Augustine, tell us holy Bernard. “She pleased by her virginity,” they both say as with one voice; “she conceived by her humility.”³ “If Mary had not been humble,” continues St. Bernard, “the Holy Ghost would not have overshadowed her;”⁴ and so she would not have become the Mother of God. But we need not go to long proofs to show this. Mary

¹ Elevatum est cor tuum in decore tuo.—Ezech. xxviii. 17.

² Eritis sicut dii.—Gen. iii. 5.

³ Virginitate placuit, humilitate conceptit.—S. Bern. Hom. 1. super missus.

⁴ Si Maria humilis non esset, super eam Spiritus Sanctus non quiescisset.

herself believes it: "He hath regarded the humility of His handmaid." God has regarded especially in me—what? Thy virginal purity? No. Thy zealous faith? No. Thy burning charity? No. Thy hope of salvation? No. Thy more than snow-white innocence? No. The modesty and decorum of thy behavior? No. What then? Humility: "He hath regarded the humility of His handmaid; for behold" on that account "all generations shall call me blessed."¹ I looked on myself as a servant, and God chose me as His Mother. "With reason," says St. Bernard again, "was the lowliest made the highest, who when she was the greatest of all professed herself the least."²

Oh, how this puts to shame the pride and vanity of the world! How I and many others are confounded, although I give myself out as an adopted child and lover of Mary! How proud and vaunting in speech, how vain in manner, how obstinate in mind, how proud, ambitious, and conceited in heart and mind I find myself to be, and therefore how unlike a child I must be to a Mother so lowly in her own estimation! "O humility! virtue of Christ!" cries out St. Bernard complaining of himself, humble as he was otherwise, "how thou dost put to shame the pride of our vanity!"³ Where and in whom is true humility to be found nowadays in the world, necessary as it is to men to enable them to enter heaven? Let us consider this in the

The same humility shames our pride.

Second Part.

The first and lowest degree of this virtue is to think little of ourselves before those who are greater than we, and to humble ourselves in their presence. Where are they who have a true knowledge of their own faults, and hate and despise themselves as miserable, sinful, and unworthy creatures, although the Apostle says: "If any man think himself to be something, whereas he is nothing, he deceiveth himself"?⁴ He does not say: he who thinks himself the best, the most pious, the greatest; but, "if any man think himself to be something;" if he imagines there is any good in himself, "he deceiveth himself." And in the same way the Lord did not say: if you have sinned, if you have broken the

There are few so humble as to acknowledge their unworthiness and to have a mean opinion of themselves.

¹ Respexit humilitatem ancillæ suæ; ecce enim ex hoc beatam me dicent omnes generationes.— Luke i. 48.

² Merito factus est novissima prima, quæ cum prima esset omnium, sese novissima factabat.

³ O humilitas, virtus Christi, quantum confundis superbiam nostræ vanitatis.

⁴ Si quis existimat se aliquid esse, cum nihil sit, ipse se seducit.—Gal. vi. 3.

commandments of God, then call yourselves unprofitable servants, but "when you shall have done all these things that are commanded you, say: we are unprofitable servants." ¹ If we lived according to this, my dear brethren, we should not extol ourselves so much in our own estimation, nor entertain such scorn and contempt for others; nor should we be so curious to remark the least fault in our neighbor, noticing the mote in his eye and neglecting the beam in our own. If all, as is their duty, were good servants of one who is higher than they, we certainly should not hear, now and then, so many complaints in the world about superiors, murmurs against authority, unbecoming remarks about the clergy, contradictions on the part of children when ordered by their parents to do something, and much less should we hear blasphemies about God Himself and about His most wise providence and ordinances. Then would there be more reverence in the churches for the great God, who is present; then would many a one not be ashamed to accompany the Blessed Sacrament when it is carried through the streets to the sick and dying. See how great is the want of humility even towards the Lord God; how much greater then must it not be towards men?

Still fewer
who wish
others to
look down
on them.

Yet at any rate there are some who are humble enough to acknowledge their own weakness and frailty; but how many of them go deeper still, and wish others to hold them in as little esteem as they deserve? Oh, there is no fear of that! If we hear the least word of praise and commendation, how our heart leaps with joy! And although we know that on account of our sins we have deserved to be made the mockery and laughing-stock of the demons forever in hell, yet we wish all to honor, praise, and love us; to esteem us as good, pious, and virtuous. If any one should dare even privately to upbraid us with faults that we know we are subject to, and that we even confess to be guilty of, or venture to chastise us for them, or with well meaning heart to exhort us to amend them; then we become angry, embittered, and full of rancor and vindictive feelings. If there are some who are subject to their superiors, how few there are who humble themselves before their equals and obey them. Oh, how difficult this is for the proud children of the world! How many words and excuses they can find to justify themselves! I am as good, they say, as he. We know very well what she is. My

¹ Cum feceritis omnia quæ præcepta sunt vobis, dicite: servi inutiles sumus.—Luke xvii. 10.

parents are not less respectable than hers: why should I yield to her? Why should I be her servant? What is he or she thinking about? and so on. And often there is a contention, as there was once among the disciples of Christ, as to which is the greater: "There was also a strife amongst them, which of them should seem to be the greater." ¹ Oh, truly it is a ridiculous thing for poor mortals to quarrel amongst themselves as to which is the greater! In the sight of God we are all in the same rank.

I will say nothing now of that higher degree of humility by which one who is adorned with many virtues and gifts of God and raised above others in wealth and honors, yet humbles himself to serve the meanest, and thinks it an honor to be looked on as lowly, simple, and mean, according to the words of the Wise Man: "The greater thou art, the more humble thyself in all things." ² How few such are to be found! And how much esteemed nowadays is the point of honor! What a subtle, delicate, ticklish thing it is! If you fail to give a man his proper rank and title, all is up between you at once; if any one touches my honor in the least, what a tragedy there is in a moment! I am ready to risk my property, my blood, my life, and not to yield a hair's breadth, until the wound of my honor is revenged. And for me to seek vengeance in blood, in the death of my opponent, it is not necessary that one should attack me with arms in his hands, or injure my good name before my face; a single word is enough to bring me to that degree of frenzy, a word spoken incautiously even by a well-meaning friend, if I only have a bare suspicion that it is directed at me and is intended to make me ridiculous, that is quite enough to fill me with rancor, hatred, anger, and implacable enmity; I cannot look at that man any more, nor speak to him! In these days of ours it is necessary to weigh our words ten times before we utter them once; for in a moment we may make an irreparable mistake. I will say nothing now of the humility of outward appearance, without which inward humility can hardly exist. "O humility, virtue of Christ, how thou dost put to shame the pride of our vanity!"

Fewer still who can bear a slight on their honor.

Alas for me if I cannot enter heaven until I am humble, until I am as vile in my own eyes, as simple in my judgments, as humble in all things as a little child in the cradle! Alas, what a sentence is pronounced on me by Our Lord in the Gospel of

Although without humility no one can please God

¹ Facta est contentio inter eos, quis eorum videretur esse major.—Luke xxii. 24.

² Quanto magnus es, humilia te in omnibus.—Ecclesi. iii. 20.

or gain
heaven.

St. Matthew : "Amen, I say to you, unless you be converted, and become as little children, you shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven." ¹ Mark these words well, my dear brethren; it is the infallible Truth who is speaking. The Lord does not say, unless you become like a poor man, a lowly servant or handmaid. Why? Because even under the ragged garment, and with a hungry stomach, a proud mind may be hidden. We must be as humble as little children. Children, although they may be the sons and daughters of great people, know nothing of pride in their years of infancy; they let the poorest servant in the house rule them; any one who wishes may take them up and carry them anywhere, set them down again, and play with them. "Unless you become as little children." If I fail to resemble such a little child in humility, I shall have no share in the kingdom of heaven. Humility is necessary whether we are great or small, rich or poor. Without humility all our good works are not worth considering; we may be as pious as we wish, pray as long as we can, mortify ourselves as much as lies in our power; if there is no humility with all this, we are only building on sand; our good works are lofty trees without fruit, thick shells without a kernel, golden vessels that are empty; for the foundation, the kernel, the preserver of all virtue, of all piety and holiness, is true humility.

Shown from
the holy
Fathers.

Examine the teaching of the holy Fathers and doctors of the Church; it will tell you the same. Ask St. Augustine what he thinks about it. He will tell you straight out: "He who performs good works without humility carries dust in the wind;" ² they will soon be blown away. Ask St. John Chrysostom what he thinks. "No virtue can be called so," he will answer, "unless it is united with humility." ³ Ask St. Bernard what you must do to go to heaven. He will tell you: "You may be saved without virginity, but not without humility." ⁴ And what he here says of virginity he means also of all other virtues and good works. If through want of time or laziness you cannot pray long, you can still be saved; if you have not the means to give alms, the strength to fast or to chastise your body, you still can be saved; but if you have not humility you cannot enter heaven, for he only shall be

¹ Amen, dico vobis, nisi conversi fueritis et efficiamini sicut parvuli, non intrabitis in regnum caelorum.— Matt. xviii. 3.

² Qui sine humilitate bona opera agit, in ventum pulverem portat.

³ Virtus non est, nisi conjunctam habeat humilitatem.

⁴ Potes sine virginitate salvari, sine humilitate non potes.—S. Bern. Hom. 1, super *Missa*.

exalted who has humbled himself: "Every one that exalteth himself shall be humbled, and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted."¹ Therefore St. Bernard in the same place does not hesitate to say: Better is the sinner who is humble than the just man who is proud. Why? Because the sinner by his humility can and will obtain forgiveness, but the just man by his pride shall lose his justice and be put to shame. An impious Achab, whom the Lord had sworn to destroy, obtained favor because he humbled himself, as we read in the Third Book of Kings: "Hast thou not seen Achab humbled before Me? therefore because he hath humbled himself for My sake, I will not bring the evil in his days."² On the other hand the proud Antiochus, although he besought God with sighs and prayers, was rejected by Him: "Then this wicked man prayed to the Lord, of whom he was not like to obtain mercy."³ A public sinner, because he is humble, is justified; the proud Pharisee who boasts of his justice is put aside: "I say to you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other."⁴ In the same way the notorious sinner Magdalene by her humble repentance became a great saint; while others who spent many years of their lives in good works were at last hurled into hell by their pride and vanity. "Therefore," concludes St. Bernard, "if you cannot imitate the virginity of Mary, and can only wonder at it, study to imitate her humility, and it will be enough for you."⁵ If you have all the virtues without humility, you have nothing; you are no adopted child of the humble Mother of God; you have no title to the kingdom of heaven. If you have no virtue as yet, but have humility, it is enough. If you cannot be as pure and unstained as Mary, nor as perfect as Mary, nor as full of grace as Mary, nor as holy and united with God as Mary, try to be as humble as Mary, and that will be enough for you.

But, you will say, of what use is this sermon to me? What profit are we to derive from it? This is a subject fitted for religious in their convents, and for others devoted to the service of God, whose duty and profession it is to study humility; and

Hence humility is necessary even to men of the world.

¹ Omnis qui se exaltat, humiliabitur, et qui se humiliat, exaltabitur.—Luke xviii. 14.

² Nonne vidiste humiliatum Achab coram me? Quia igitur humiliatus est mei causa, non inducam malum in diebus ejus.—III. Kings xxi. 29.

³ Orabat autem hic scelestus Dominum, a quo non esset misericordiam consecutus.—I. Mach. ix. 13.

⁴ Dico vobis, descendit hic justificatus in domum suam ab illo.—Luke xviii. 14.

⁵ Si igitur virginitatem in Maria non potes nisi mirari; stude humilitatem imitari, et afficit tibi.—S. Bern. loc. cit.

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without exception, as the way to heaven is open to all.

it is necessary for them in order that they may have more glory in heaven. We men of the world know nothing of humility; if we keep the commandments of God we shall have done enough. Yes? Do you know so little of humility in the world? So much the worse for you then! You are indeed to be pitied! Do you know nothing of humility? Then you may not boast of being children of the Mother of God. Birds of a feather flock together! A proud servant and a humble queen, a humble mother and a conceited child is a very ill-assorted union indeed. Do not people in the world think anything of humility? Alas! it is only too true, and therefore so few of them enter heaven. Humility, I say, not I indeed, but the Fathers and doctors of the Church and God Himself, humility belongs not only to religious, but also to worldly people whatever be their rank, sex, or condition. I can prove this clearly and briefly: is heaven made only for the clergy and religious? Have the laity nothing to do with it, no share in it? What do you think? Of course you will not at all agree with that; you will all cry out with one voice: No! that is not the case! We must have a claim to heaven too; we are men created for heaven, as well as religious; we believe and hope that we shall get to heaven as well as you. And you are right, my dear brethren. We are all called to heaven, we all hope to get there, and wo to him who fails to enter it! It were better for him he were never born. But he who is interested in heaven must also be concerned with the means necessary to enter it; is not that so? Truly! He who wishes to go from Treves to Coblenz must set out on the right way; otherwise he will not reach the end of his journey. Now there is no other way to heaven but by humility, no other means of gaining it, as you have heard from the holy Fathers and doctors of the Church. But, you might object, they are speaking for religious like themselves? Then wait a little: you must in any case believe the Almighty God, who says straight out: "Unless you become as little children, you shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven." That He is speaking of humility, and not to the apostles alone, is evident from what follows: "Whosoever," no matter who he may be, "shall humble himself as this little child, he is the greater in the kingdom of heaven."¹ You will find countless other texts in Holy Writ to confirm the same truth. He will bring to salvation,

¹ Quicumque ergo humiliaverit se sicut parvulus iste, hic est major in regno cœlorum.—
Matt. xviii. 4.

says the Prophet David—whom? “He will save the humble of spirit,”¹ and bring them to Himself in heaven. Eternal glory is prepared, says the Wise Man—for whom? “Glory shall uphold the humble of spirit.”² Without grace no one may enter heaven; to whom does He give grace? “To the humble He giveth grace,”³ as He says by St. Peter. In these and other passages He speaks of all in general.

Do you not yet believe it? Then tell me: did God become man only to teach religious? Did He mean to be a model, a door, a way to heaven for them alone when He said: “I am the door. By Me if any man enter in He shall be saved.”⁴ “I am the way... no man cometh to the Father but by Me.”⁵ Must you not acknowledge that Christ is a teacher for all, a door and a way for the laity as well as for religious? Truly, and you are right! Now go and examine the whole life of Christ, see how He went before us, what sort of a way He pointed out for us, and you will find that the three and thirty years of His life were spent in the constant exercise of humility. This is shown by the poor swaddling-clothes, by the wooden manger at Bethlehem in which He was born; this is shown by His circumcision, which He suffered as if He were a sinner; by the flight into Egypt by which He saved Himself as if He were a weak child; by the lowly cottage at Nazareth, in which He lived as a poor workman, subject to His parents and unknown to the world. This is confirmed by the persecutions, mockeries, stripes, crown of thorns, the cross, and the shameful death He suffered thereon, when He hung between two thieves as the worst of criminals, suspended between heaven and earth. All that He did and undertook cries out to us the words of the Apostle: “He emptied Himself.”⁶ See, my dear brethren, the way He has shown us to heaven. And now examine the doctrine He has taught. On one occasion He said: “Learn of Me.” What, O Lord? Thou hast done many things. Thou hast made the world out of nothing; we cannot learn that. Thou hast made the blind to see, the deaf to hear; Thou hast raised the dead to life; must we learn those things from Thee? But they are naturally impossible to us. Oh, no! not such things

For Christ proposes Himself to all as a Model of humility.

¹ Humiles spiritu salvabit.—Ps. xxxiii. 19.

² Humilem spiritu suscipiet gloria.—Prov. xxix. 23.

³ Humilibus dat gratiam.—I. Pet. v. 5.

⁴ Ego sum ostium. Per me si quis introierit, salvabitur.—John x. 9.

⁵ Ego sum via ... nemo venit ad Patrem, nisi per me.—Ibid. xiv. 6.

⁶ Semetipsum exinanivit.—Philipp. ii. 7.

have you to learn! "Learn of Me because I am meek and humble of heart."¹ Once He said: "I have given you an example, that as I have done to you so you do also."² How, my dear brethren? What had He done then? He had not wrought a miracle, nor sat in the temple teaching the doctors and learned men; but He had knelt at the feet of His disciples, the poor fishermen, and washed them. How often did He not say to His disciples, and in their persons to all of us: "The Son of man is not come to be ministered unto, but to minister."³ "Whosoever will be greater shall be your minister: and whosoever will be first among you shall be the servant of all,"⁴ and many passages of the same nature. Now I can draw a conclusion that no one can dispute: if heaven belongs to the laity as well as to others; if the way to heaven is open to all; if Christ is the general way, the general teacher, the general example showing the road to heaven to the laity as well as to religious; and if this way, this teaching, this example consists chiefly in humility, then humility is a virtue necessary for the laity as well as for religious; therefore if the whole world wishes to gain heaven, the whole world must practise humility. Deny this, if you can.

For no one can keep the commandments without humility.

Yet I see that you have still a way out of the difficulty; you will appeal to another expression of Our Lord in which He says: "If thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments."⁵ It is enough for us then, you will say, to keep the commandments; we do not want humility; not one of the commandments says a word about it. Surely you have made a grand hit this time; this appeal of yours is a clever one indeed! No doubt if you keep the commandments you shall go to heaven; but how are you to keep them if you are not humble? Not at all. I will take only the two chief commandments, which include all the others: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart, and with thy whole soul, and with thy whole mind,"⁶ and that too above all things. Therefore you must do many things that are contrary to your sensuality and pride; you must avoid many things that you would willingly do according to your natural desires; how

¹ Discite a me quia mitis sum et humilis corde.—Matt. xi. 29.

² Exemplum dedi vobis, ut quemadmodum ego feci vobis, ita et vos faciatis.—John xiii. 15.

³ Filius hominis non venit ut ministraretur ei, sed ut ministraret.—Mark x. 45.

⁴ Quicumque voluerit fieri major, erit vester minister: et quicumque voluerit in vobis primus esse, erit omnium servus.—Ibid. 43, 44.

⁵ Si vis ad vitam ingredi, serva mandata.—Matt. xix. 17.

⁶ Dilige Dominum Deum tuum ex toto corde tuo, et in tota anima tua, et in tota mente tua.—Ibid. xxii. 37.

On the Humility of Mary in the Annunciation. 419

can you do this without humbling yourself before God? The other law says: "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself."¹ Mark the words: thy neighbor. But thy neighbor is every one who is greater than you, equal to you, or inferior to you. Your neighbor is your enemy as well as your friend; he whom you cannot bear, who makes you angry, who speaks ill of you, who grievously injures you, etc. All these are your neighbors, and mark that you must not merely regard them with indifference, but must love them as yourself. You must wish them well, as you would yourself; do them good as to yourself; honor them as you do yourself. How can you do that without humility? Once for all: it is impossible. Therefore, if you wish to go to heaven, where you cannot enter without keeping the commandments, you must be humble. See now, my dear brethren, whether this does not concern lay-people too. Wo then to the man of the world who is not humble! Wo and double wo to those who now despise and contemn and, what is worse, oppress the humble! for the humble are the apple of God's eye, who keeps them in His sight, while He drives the proud far away from Him: "He looketh on the low, and the high he knoweth afar off."²

But you, who are poor and abandoned, contemptible and lowly in the sight of the world, and at the same time are really humble of heart, rejoice! Rejoice you too who are in a menial condition and are lowly in your own eyes! The Queen of angels boasted of being a handmaid! Only accept your lowliness with contented hearts from the hand of God, and be resigned to your humiliation; if you do that you will be of the number of those of whom Christ speaks, as of those who are like Himself: "Suffer the little children to come unto Me." Why? "For of such is the kingdom of God."³ For them the gate of heaven is opened; but the proud must bend and lower themselves if they wish to enter by the narrow gate. To all of you, my dear brethren, no matter who you may be, I address the words of St. Bernard: "I beg and beseech of you, above all things try to imitate the humility of Mary."⁴ You will find opportunities enough, if you only wish to be humble. To be silent when something is said to displease you; to acknowledge your fault when you have committed one; to restrain yourself when you could find something

Exhortation
to humility.

¹ Diliges proximum tuum sicut teipsum.—Matt. xxii. 39.

² Humilia respicit, et alta a longe cognoscit.—Ps. cxxxvii. 6.

³ Sinite parvulos venire ad me; tallum est enim regnum Dei.—Mark x. 14.

⁴ Obsecro et plurimum rogo: stude humilitatem imitari.

to say in your own defence; to yield to him whom you would rather oppose; to be friendly with one towards whom you have a natural aversion; to bear all incidental trials and difficulties, knowing that you have well deserved them by your sins; if you have sinned, to confess your guilt candidly to your own confusion; in outward demeanor, in dress and manners not to conform to the laws and customs of the world, but to the humble gospel of Christ, and to behave with modesty and reserve; to do and to omit what the law of God requires, without respect to what people may think or say; and in many similar instances that are of daily occurrence, to overcome yourself valiantly, out of humility, through love for Christ and His holy Mother; that is the way to love Jesus and Mary and to honor them in the true sense of the word; that is the way to become like a little child; that is the way to enter heaven by humility.

Resolve earnestly to strive after humility.

Ah yes, my God! have I not good reason to keep myself lowly and humble? I should wrong Thee, I must acknowledge it, I should wrong Thee if I wish to form a great opinion of myself; for in and of myself I am sheer nothingness. All that is praiseworthy in me is not mine; it belongs to Thee; Thou hast given it to me for nothing, and at any hour or moment Thou canst take it from me again. If Thou hast given me more riches and worldly goods than to others, am I better on that account? How soon canst Thou not, if Thou wilt, make me a poor beggar like others? If Thou hast placed me in a higher position than others, am I therefore more than they? How soon canst Thou not hurl me down, and make me like them? If Thou hast given me more understanding, knowledge, bodily strength, gifts and graces, shall I therefore think myself better than others? What a ridiculous and intolerable thing it would be for a beggar to extol himself above his fellows and look down on them, because he has received a larger piece of bread at the door! We are all only beggars before Thee, and we must beg at the door of Thy graces for our daily bread. The day will come on which we shall see and acknowledge who is the greatest and best amongst men; and how many a one who must now humbly stand in the background will then be brought forward, while those who now hold their heads high will then have to take a lowly place? Perhaps he whom I now despise is in high honor before Thee; perhaps he whom I now wish to honor me with bared head will be crowned by Thee with the crown of glory, while I shall have to stand

there ashamed and confused. Should I not be humble and place myself under everyone's feet, since I must acknowledge that on account of my sins I have long ago deserved to suffer eternal shame among the demons in hell? Can I entertain pride when I consider Thee, my sovereign God, as poor servant, and thee, O Mary, the Mother of God, as a lowly handmaid? Oh, no, my Lord, I have no reason for acting in that manner. To Thee belongs honor, to Thee alone all praise; to me nothing but shame, confusion, contempt. If then, O Lord, Thou wilt humiliate me in this world, do so! I acknowledge with David, "Before I was humbled I offended."¹ And I have offended only too much and too often! If Thou wilt humble me still more, I am ready. Come, O desolation, poverty, contempt, oppression, scorn! I shall no more be afraid of you, since I see that you were valuable and precious to my God and to His holy Mother. By your means I shall become like to them; by you I will show my love to Jesus and Mary; by you I will mount up to heaven: "I will make myself meaner than I have done; and I will be little in my own eyes;"² in my mind, my thoughts, my manners, my words and actions. I will become humble before Thee, my God, humble before men, "and I shall appear more glorious."³ By that humility I hope that I shall one day shine all the more gloriously in eternity with Thy humble servants. O most humble Mother Mary, obtain this for me and all of us from thy humble Son! Amen.

THIRTY-FIRST SERMON.

THE CHARITY OF MARY IN THE VISITATION.

Subject.

1. Charity and mercy impelled Mary to go to the house of Elizabeth. 2. We should and must learn from Mary to do similar works of charity and mercy to our neighbor.—*Preached on the feast of the Visitation of the Blessed Virgin Mary.*

Text.

Intravit in domum Zachariæ, et salutavit Elizabeth.—Luke i. 40.

"She entered into the house of Zachary, and saluted Elizabeth."

¹ Priusquam humiliar ego deliqui.—Ps. cxviii. 67.

² Villior sum plus quam factus sum, et ero humilis in oculis meis.—II. Kings vi. 22.

³ Et gloriosior apparebo.—Ibid.

Introduction.

Mary visited Elizabeth; is that such a wonderful mystery that the Church of God should honor it every year by a special feast? What is more common in the world than to visit now and then, and return visits? That is required by politeness, urbanity, and mutual charity. And what wonder is it that one relative, one cousin, as Mary and Elizabeth were related, should go to see the other? So we might think, my dear brethren, when we consider the matter only naturally and according to its outward appearance. But when we look into it closely, we find that after Mary had conceived the Divine Word in her womb all her actions and movements concealed a special and holy mystery. If I consider the end and object of this journey and visitation, and what she did in the house of Elizabeth, oh, what a beautiful example of virtue she offers for our imitation and instruction, and that two of the most excellent virtues that one can practise towards another, namely, of charity and mercy, as I now mean to show by way of meditation for our instruction.

Plan of Discourse.

Charity and mercy impelled Mary to go to the house of Elizabeth: this I shall show in the first part. We should and must learn from Mary to do similar works of charity and mercy to our neighbor: this I shall prove in the second part.

That we may all be powerfully impelled to do our duty in this respect, do thou, O most loving Virgin and Mother of mercy, obtain for us the light and grace of the Holy Ghost! Holy angels, help to effect this in those committed to your charge!

The works
of mercy are
twofold.

As man consists of two parts, a corruptible body and an immortal soul, so there are two kinds of works of charity and mercy that can be done for him. The first concerns the body, and consists in giving our neighbor clothing, food, drink, attendance, and care when required; the second is far more important, for it concerns the soul, supplying it with instruction, exhortation, consolation, keeping it from evil and encouraging it to good.

Both were
practised by
Mary in her

We have an example of the two in the visit paid by Mary to the house of Elizabeth, and that in the most perfect degree. First, with regard to the corporal works of mercy, let no one imagine

that the visit of the Blessed Virgin was like the visits paid each other nowadays by people of the world, the motive of which is mere worldly politeness, while the time is spent in an empty interchange of words, or in paying grandiloquent and sometimes hypocritical compliments, the person who is visited being obliged to appear as if a great honor and pleasure were done him, while in reality he wishes often that his visitor were a thousand miles away from him. Such was not at all the case with the Blessed Virgin. What an indescribable, and at the same time sensible consolation Elizabeth must have found in the gracious presence of an amiable and holy virgin, who was also nearly related to her, and whom perhaps she had never seen before! And indeed when Mary opened her lips and uttered the first words of greeting Elizabeth could hardly contain herself for joy, and in place of returning the salutation "she cried out with a loud voice, and said: Blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb. And whence is this to me, that the Mother of my Lord should come to me? For behold as soon as the voice of thy salutation sounded in my ears, the infant in my womb leaped for joy." ¹ What comfort must she not have had from the stay that the Blessed Virgin made with her for three months! But the love of Mary was not satisfied with giving her merely this comfort. In our ordinary visits the guest is received and waited on with every mark of courtesy and politeness; quite different was the end and object the Blessed Virgin had in going to see her cousin. She could well have said of herself what her divine Son said afterwards to His disciples: "I am not come to be ministered unto, but to minister." ² For Elizabeth, owing to old age and household cares, was very feeble, and required help and attendance; this office the Blessed Virgin was not disposed to leave to others, but kept it for herself, and, as the holy Fathers testify, during the three months of her stay she fulfilled it with the utmost exactness.

visitation;
and first,
the corporal
works.

With great
self-abase-
ment.

A mystery, my dear brethren, which, when we rightly consider it, deserves our admiration. For what was the state of the Blessed Virgin at the time? Shortly before the angel had saluted her with the title "full of grace;" and, as St. Ambrose says, she

¹ Exclamavit voce magna: Benedicta tu inter mulieres, et benedictus fructus ventris tui. Et unde hoc mihi, ut veniat Mater Domini mei ad me? Ecce enim ut facta est vox salutationis tue in auribus meis, exultavit in gaudio infans in utero meo. — Luke i. 42-44.

² Non venit ministrari, sed ministrare. — Matt. xx. 28.

then conceived the Holy of holies.¹ She was the Mother of the Most High, and therefore was exalted not only above all men, but above the angels also, and after her Creator the highest honor and reverence were due to her from all creatures. If we had seen her as she left the house at Nazareth and knew what she was, should we not have imagined that she was on her way to Jerusalem, there to have herself proclaimed as the Mother of the future Messiah and Saviour of the world, and to be acknowledged as Queen of heaven and earth? Could we have thought the object of her journey was to seek service in a strange house, and to act the part of a handmaid? And yet such was the case. "See what wonderful humility," exclaims St. Ambrose; "the Mother of God, following the example of her Son, emptied herself, taking the form of a servant!"² I know well that in all the actions of this holy Virgin humility held the first place; but nowhere is it more evident than in her visitation. She called herself a handmaid in the Annunciation. "Behold the handmaid." But of whom? "Of the Lord." Here in the house of Elizabeth she not only calls herself a servant, but actually does the duties of one—and for whom? For a mere creature, who was far inferior to her in dignity, and who, as soon as she saw the Virgin coming, exclaimed in astonishment: "Whence is this to me, that the Mother of my Lord should come to me?" How have I merited such a favor? What didst thou think, Elizabeth, when thou sawest the Mother of thy Lord, and had to allow her to wait on thee? So true are the words of the Apostle: "Charity is not ambitious: is not puffed up."³ It knows nothing of pride; it does not wait to consider who the person is who is in need of help, or to ask whether he is great or lowly, rich or poor, weak or powerful; all is one to it; its only object is to do good to others.

The spiritual works she performed for John the Baptist.

But it was not alone the wish to perform the corporal works of mercy that brought Mary to the house of Elizabeth; she had a far more important end in view. When a virgin always occupied with the thought of God, so fond of solitude, always living apart from company, who had never been anywhere except in the temple at the foot of the altar, or in her chamber praying and meditating—when that most wise and holy virgin, who now more than ever must have preferred to meditate in stillness and quiet

¹ *Virgo Verbo foeta, Deo plena.*

² *Vide humilitatem; exinanivit se Del Mater, exemplo Filii, formam ancillæ accipiens!*

³ *Charitas non est ambitiosa: non inflatur.—I. Cor. xiii. 5, 4.*

ecstasy the wonderful mystery of the incarnate God, when she leaves the solitude so dear to her, goes away from her house, undertakes a journey of two or three days over a mountainous country, and through gloomy forests (nay, she does not go, she seems rather to fly, such is her anxiety to arrive at her destination: "And Mary rising up went unto the hill country with haste"¹) that, as it seems to me, must signify something more than a mere desire on her part to perform the corporal works of mercy in favor of Elizabeth. And truly the wish to perform the spiritual works of mercy, her zealous desire to do good to souls gave her wings, as it were, and impelled her to use such haste. To convert sinners, to bring the just to greater perfection, these are the most excellent effects of the grace of God in souls, and these were what the presence of Mary helped to bring about in the house of Zachary. John, still in his mother's womb, was in the state of original sin, and thus he was a sinner and a slave of the devil; immediately on the arrival of the Mother of God he was freed from original sin and sanctified; for the holy Fathers are of the opinion that this happened when he leaped for joy at hearing the greeting of Mary, and that he then recognized the presence of the Saviour whom he was afterwards to announce and point out to the world.

If the words of David are infallibly true: "With the holy thou wilt be holy, and with the innocent man thou wilt be innocent,"² who can say how much Elizabeth advanced in sanctity and perfection during the stay of this most holy and enlightened virgin? Oh, would that we could have seen them, and heard the heavenly discourse of these two souls so wrapped up in God; the questions put by Elizabeth, the answers given by Mary! No doubt they spoke but few words that were not of God and divine things. Methinks I hear them speak of the greatness and glory of God, of the almighty power and mercy of God, of the graces and benefits they had received from God, of the promises the Lord made His people, that were now being fulfilled, of the desire and longing to see the Son and Saviour of the world, whom the Virgin bore in her womb, and to offer Him to the heavenly Father for the salvation of men. How often the Mother of God must have repeated the canticle which she spoke on her first entry into the house of Zachary: "My soul doth magnify the Lord, and my

For Elizabeth.

¹ *Exurgens Maria, abiit in montana cum festinatione.*—Luke i. 39.

² *Cum sancto sanctus eris, et cum viro innocente innocens eris.*—Ps. xvii. 26.

spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour" !¹ What wonderful light illumined the soul of Elizabeth during those conversations, and with what ardent charity her heart was inflamed! for at her first greeting of Mary, at the first words she addressed to her, she was filled with the Holy Ghost. I leave the meditation of this to your devout thoughts, and go on to the instruction in the

Second Part.

The works of charity and mercy excel all others in value and merit.

The spiritual works of mercy excel all other good works in value and merit. "There is," says St. Gregory Nazianzen, "nothing so divine in man as the power of doing good;"² there is nothing which more enables him to ascend to a likeness with his Creator, whose mercies, as David says, are above all His works.³ Therefore St. John Chrysostom calls beneficence and mercy "the collar of the children of God, the sign of nobility of the saints;" this, he continues, "builds for us a mansion in heaven, and prepares an eternal dwelling for us."⁴ I have never yet read in any book, writes St. Jerome to Nepotianus, "that one who willingly performed the works of mercy died an unhappy death."⁵ It is on account of these works alone that the Judge will call the sheep to His side on the last day; and on account of not having performed these works the wicked shall be banished into eternal fire, as I have already shown on a former occasion when speaking of the marks of predestination.

We have abundant opportunities of imitating Mary in doing them.

To no purpose, my dear brethren, should we cast our eyes on the Blessed Virgin if we do not endeavor to follow in her footsteps and to imitate her virtues to the best of our ability. Oh, what a number of golden opportunities we have of daily following the example of this beneficent Mother in doing the works of mercy, if we only are not wanting in the spirit of charity! Have we not poor brothers and sisters enough towards whom we may show our generosity, especially in those troublous times when want is so wide-spread, the poor so numerous, bread so dear, money so scarce among the common people, that many decent poor can hardly stave off hunger from themselves and their families with all their hard work?

¹ Magnificat anima mea Dominum, et exultavit spiritus meus in Deo salutari meo.—Luke 1. 46, 47.

² Nihil adeo divinum habet homo, quam benefacere.

³ Misericordiores ejus super omnia opera ejus —Ps. cxliv. 9.

⁴ Torquem filiorum Dei, nobilium sanctorum; hæc nobis mansionem in caelis ædificat, et æterna tabernacula præparat.

⁵ Mala morte mortuum, qui libenter opera charitatis exercuit.

But what do I say about generosity! Are we not already obliged to be liberal to the poor, according to our means? When a father sends his sons to a foreign land, he generally gives the money for their support to the eldest; not because he loves him more, but because he considers him the most sensible; nor is it his intention that the eldest should keep all for himself, but rather that he should share with the others. In the same way, in noble and princely families, the eldest son is generally made head of the house and heir to all the property, under condition that he gives to his brothers and sisters the portions that belong to them. "The silver is mine, and the gold is mine, saith the Lord of hosts."¹ Whereon St. Augustine writes: "Therefore it is not yours, O rich ones of earth!"² You are, as it were, the eldest sons, to whom God, as the common Father and Provider of all, has given the inheritance of worldly goods; but you must know that you are not to spend them all on yourselves, but to share them reasonably with your brothers and sisters, that is, with your fellow-men, and to help them in their necessities; therefore the poor are wronged when you refuse to assist them, and withhold the portion that God has given into your hands for them.

And we are bound to do so.

Wo to those who are parsimonious in this respect, when the poor are obliged to cry out to their Father in heaven, and to complain bitterly that they are neglected! "Judgment without mercy to him that hath not done mercy."³ Hear this, ye hard-hearted people, who in the time of scarcity keep your granaries closed, to extort more money from the poor, so that, as experience has recently taught us, the hungry poor are forced to borrow money, and, with tears in their eyes and folded hands, to beg and implore a little corn for that money, in order to be able to make some bread: and yet many a time they are sent away from the door with empty hands and hungry! Oh, what a beautiful work of mercy is done by those who in such times open their granaries and sell corn to the poor at a low price! If that were done everywhere, there would not be so many decent poor obliged to suffer hunger with their families, and to deplore the niggardly parsimony of the rich. What a beautiful work of mercy in times of scarcity to lend grain to the poor who have no money, wait-

Wo to those who neglect them!

¹ Meum est argentum, et meum est aurum, dicit Dominus exercituum.—Agg. ii. 9.

² Non est ergo vestrum, O divites terre!

³ Judicium sine misericordia est illi, qui non fecit misericordiam.—James ii. 13.

ing till the next spring for them to restore it in the same measure and at the same price; not as some un-Christian usurers do, who in dear times lend six or seven measures of corn to the poor on condition of receiving eight from them the following spring! What theology could approve of such a mode of action? Wo to them if God were to deal with them in the same way, and require them to restore what they have wronged others of! "Judgment without mercy to him that hath not done mercy."

The saints by their example give us further opportunities.

Again, what beautiful opportunities of doing works of mercy we may find elsewhere! Are there not sick people enough whom we might visit and attend to sometimes? Are there not afflicted enough whom we might occasionally console? Are there not enough now and then in want of a word of advice, or of help, protection, and defence, whom we could easily assist? Ah, if we had only a little spark of that charity which inflamed the heart of Mary and her imitators, we would not wait for opportunities of doing good, but would eagerly seek for them. The holy Bishop Paulinus, after having given all his goods and money to the poor, sold himself into slavery in order to redeem the son of a poor widow. Could we not sometimes send a little food to a poor prisoner, or even bring it to him ourselves? St. Martin took off his own cloak to clothe a poor man. St. Dominic, while still a youth, sold all his books during a time of scarcity in Spain, to feed the poor with the proceeds. During a famine in Burgundy, Ecdicius, a counsellor, sold all his goods, and fed thereby four thousand poor; for which the Lord made him this promise: "Ecdicius, because thou hast done this thing, bread shall not be wanting to you nor to your descendants forever!"¹ So says St. Gregory of Tours. Oh, what luxury and extravagance are displayed by many nowadays in dress, furniture, and other ways! How easily, O Lord, could not such things be done without, that Jesus Christ, in the persons of His poor, might have bread to eat, if only Christian charity took the place of vanity in the hearts of some people! Placilla, Radegundis, Elizabeth—my memory is too weak to recall any more names—princely, royal, imperial ladies, thought it an honor to attend on the sick in the public hospitals, and to give them food and drink on bended knees, not otherwise than if they were waiting on Our Lord Himself. It is not many years ago since I myself knew here in Treves pious people of illustrious

¹ Ecdici, quia fecisti hanc rem, tibi et semini tuo panis non deerit in sempiternum.—Greg. Tur. L. 2. Hist. Franc. c. 24.

families, who daily used to carry to the poorest and most destitute sick food that they bought or cooked themselves, wrapped up in a cloth or covered in a dish, and they would, moreover, make the beds for the sick people, and do other services for them. They now rest in peace, according to the promise of the Almighty: "Blessed is he that understandeth concerning the needy and the poor; the Lord will deliver him in the evil day."¹

Ah, Christian charity, what has become of thee? How cold and languid thou art with many Christians! Holy Virgin, Queen of heaven, Mother of the sovereign King, teach this day some of thy sex at least henceforth to forget the vanity and luxury displayed in the visits they pay; visits, the sole object of which is to show themselves off and parade their dress, thus putting themselves to unnecessary expense, and making it impossible for them to give alms to the poor as they should! Teach them that it is not unbecoming their sex, rank, or position, that it is no indignity, but rather an honor and glory, for them to visit the poor, the needy, the sick, and attend to their wants. Teach them that by so doing they will present an agreeable spectacle to the angels in heaven, and will appear all the greater and more illustrious in the sight of God the more humble and charitable they show themselves in the performance of such works of mercy. Teach us all, especially, to be most diligent in doing the works of mercy after thy example.

Deplorable that our charity is so cold.

This is the chief thing, my dear brethren, in which we should follow the example of our dear Mother. This is the object of that command of God, given by the Wise Man: "He gave to every one of them commandment concerning his neighbor."² Certainly, if the law of Christian charity binds us to help our neighbor in his corporal necessities when we can, much more does the same charity bind us to further the salvation of his immortal soul. Great is the error of many men who have the ability and opportunity to instruct others in good, to encourage them to virtue by advice, warning, and exhortation, to restrain them from evil and to prevent sin; and yet—I know not whether it is through love of comfort, or laziness, or shame—they omit all those good works, thinking they have enough to do to look after their own souls, and that the souls of others are no con-

Especially with regard to the spiritual works of mercy, to which we are all bound.

¹ *Beatus qui intelligit super egenum et pauperem; in die mala liberabit eum Dominus.—Ps. xl. 2.*

² *Mandavit illis unculque de proximo suo.—Eccles. xvii. 12.*

cern of theirs. Such people might be called good men, but certainly they are not good neighbors: good men, because they are pious in themselves; not good neighbors, because they do not contribute to the general well-being. St. John Chrysostom shows the injustice of this error: Consider, he says, how things go in the world; there is hardly any one, no matter how little he has, or can do, who does not help in some way to the general good in temporal things; the poor man, since he has not much, is compelled to work, and thus to help the rich man; the rich man has money and property, with which he pays the poor for serving him, and so he helps them; the learned man has knowledge, and thereby helps the ignorant man; the soldier protects the prince, the prince supports the soldier; and so on through all states of life. From which St. Chrysostom concludes: "If in worldly matters no one lives for himself only, how much more is it not necessary to serve the common good in spiritual things?"¹ in matters that concern the soul and eternal salvation, so that we all may help each other to attain the end for which God has created us, and to which we are called by Him?

Especially parents and superiors, the most of whom neglect their duty.

And this is not only right and just, but for many, such as parents, the heads of families, and superiors, it is a matter of bounden duty. "The little ones have asked for bread, and there was none to break it unto them."² Such is the complaint uttered by the Prophet Jeremias of the miserable state of the Hebrew infants, who had not bread to eat, or if they had it, were without a loving mother to break it for them, so that they might eat it. Oh, in how many Christian houses little ones are found for whom the bread of the soul is not broken! I mean the sons, daughters, and servants, who, although they are nearly grown up, are yet like little ones as far as the knowledge of the things necessary to salvation are concerned; they know, indeed, how to make the sign of the cross, to say the Our Father and the Creed, but they understand little or nothing of what and how to believe, or how to live according to the faith; and that through the carelessness of their parents and superiors. How many Christian houses there are in which the children and servants are never sent to catechism or instruction, so that they seldom or never hear anything good, or are exhorted to the practice of virtue!

¹ Si in sæcularibus rebus sibi vivit nemo; quanto magis in spiritualibus oportet hoc facere?—3. Chrys. Hom. 34.

² Parvull petierunt panem, et non erat qui frangeret eis.—Lam. iv. 4.

Well known is the incident related by Cantipratanus. A priest had been appointed to preach on the occasion of a synod held by the ecclesiastical superiors of a certain church in France; but he had no time to prepare, and the devil thus addressed him: Go, and say nothing more than the following words: The rulers of infernal darkness send a most friendly greeting to the superiors of the church, and thank them most sincerely for their negligence in instructing the people in good; for from that comes ignorance, and from ignorance sins and vices, which daily fill our hell with souls. The same sermon I might well preach to many fathers and mothers, masters and mistresses, superiors and others in authority: The rulers of hell send you a friendly greeting; they rejoice that you keep on such good terms with them; they thank you for being so careless in instructing those under your care, and for taking such little pains to bring them up in a Christian and virtuous manner, and for so carefully training them to luxury and vanity; they thank you for not removing occasions of sin out of their way; for not reproving and chastising, as your duty requires, their sins and vices; they thank you for leading them into evil by your words, and sometimes by your scandalous example; for that is the best means of ruining souls.

To the
great joy of
the demons.

I conclude, my dear brethren, in the words of Our Lord: "Be ye, therefore, merciful, as your Father also is merciful."¹ To-day I say to you: as your heavenly Mother is loving and merciful, be charitable towards your neighbor when his temporal and corporal necessities require your aid; be merciful especially when there is question of furthering the salvation of his soul. Charity is ingenious; where there is zeal for the honor of God and the good of souls opportunities and occasions can be found in plenty. O God of goodness, grant to and increase in me and all of us this holy zeal! Ah, have I not by bad example, allurements, co-operation, given many souls occasion to offend Thee! Perhaps some of them are now in hell with the demons, and I have been the occasion of their damnation. I still owe Thee restitution for those souls; shall I not, then, say, with all the powers of my soul, in the words of David: O Lord, I have sinned, and scandalized Thy people by my sins! Therefore I will in future try to make good the harm I have done: "I will teach the unjust Thy ways, and the wicked shall be converted to

Conclusion
and exhortation
to perform the
works of
mercy.

¹ Estote misericordes, sicut et Pater vester misericors est.—Luke vi. 36.

Thee.”¹ If I can do good to souls in no other manner, then I will at least humbly pray every day for myself and all sinners, so that we may be converted to Thee with all our hearts, serve Thee constantly, and, after the short journey of this life, come to Thee and to Thy Mother in the happy home of eternity. Amen.

THIRTY-SECOND SERMON.

ON THE BEAUTY AND HUMILITY OF MARY IN THE PURIFICATION.

Subject.

1. Mary, most beautiful and pure in soul and body, conceals her innocence, and, by fulfilling the precept of purification, gives herself out to the world as an ordinary, sinful woman. 2. The sinner, hideous in soul and body, conceals his deformity, and, by deferring his purification, endeavors to pass as perfectly innocent.—*Preached on the feast of the Purification of the Blessed Virgin Mary.*

Text.

Postquam impleti sunt dies purgationis ejus secundum legem Moysi.—Luke ii. 22.

“After the days of her purification according to the law of Moses were accomplished.”

Introduction.

How am I to understand those words: “After the days of her purification were accomplished”? Was Mary, then, under the necessity of purification? What was there in her that rendered that ceremony necessary? Was she not a most holy, beautiful, pure, and immaculate virgin in body and soul? Truly she was, my dear brethren. And yet this virgin submitted to the law and appears in the temple, concealing her innocence and beauty, in order to be purified as an ordinary sinful and unclean woman. What am I to think of this, my dear brethren? Does not this conduct of hers put to shame our inborn pride, by which we show to the world only what is grand and glorious in ourselves, while we conceal so carefully what is deformed and sinful, not

¹ Docebo iniquos vias tuas; et impii ad te convertentur.—Ps. 1. 15.

only from the eyes of men, but, if possible, from the eyes of God as well, and try to cover our guilt with a cloak of innocence. In this sermon, which shall be partly a panegyric and partly a moral discourse, I will contrast those two personages so opposed to each other, namely, the Blessed Virgin and sinful man.

Plan of Discourse.

Mary, most beautiful and pure in soul and body, hides her innocence, when, by fulfilling the law of purification, she gives herself out to the world as an ordinary, sinful woman: the first part. The sinner, who is deformed in body and soul, hides his guilt, and by deferring his purification, wishes to be looked on by all as completely innocent: the second part.

To the greatest praise of Mary and the greatest confusion of the sinner, to the salutary instruction of us all, and to encourage us to try to imitate, as far as possible, this holy Mother by purity of body and soul. O most beautiful Virgin, who didst on this day wish to appear as a guilty and sinful woman! obtain this grace for us from thy divine Son. Ye spirits of heaven, help us, too, by your prayers!

We find in the holy Scriptures mention of many of the female sex who were celebrated on account of their beauty, and, as they could not hide it, they overcame and subdued even the bravest, wildest, and most holy men. Beautiful was Rachel: "Well-favored and of a beautiful countenance;"¹ and as she could not hide her beauty, she so inflamed Jacob with love, that fourteen long years of hard work, which he had to spend in order to secure her hand, seemed to him but a few days: "They seemed but a few days."² Beautiful was Bethsabee: "The woman was very beautiful;"³ and she brought the holy King David so far, when he happened to cast his eyes on her, that he forgot his God, and became an adulterer and a murderer. Beautiful was Judith: "She was exceedingly beautiful;"⁴ and when, acting on divine inspiration, she adorned herself, she tamed the savage Holofernes till he became a lamb in her hands. Beautiful was Esther: "She was exceeding fair and beautiful;"⁵ and when she came forward and let her beauty be seen, she induced the

The beauty of other women is but vanity.

¹ Decora facie, et venusto aspectu.—Gen. xxix. 17.

² Videbantur illi pauci dies.—Ibid. 20.

³ Erat autem mulier pulchra valde.—II. Kings xi. 2.

⁴ Erat autem eleganti aspectu nimis.—Judith viii. 7.

⁵ Pulchra nimis et decora facie.—Esth. ii. 7.

angry King Assuerus to hang his favorite, Aman, on a gibbet. But why do I speak of such beauty? They were only mere mortals who were captivated by it, and in itself it was but a mere outward thing, that had to decay with age and become the food of worms after death. And for the most part this beauty only serves to give occasion to a base and ruinous love, and thus acts as a cloak to hide the hideousness and deformity of vice.

Compared to the beauty and purity of Mary. She was most fair in body.

Quite different is the beauty to which I wish to invite your attention; namely, the beauty and comeliness that fills with admiration, and, as it were, captivates the love, not of mortal men, but of the sovereign God Himself. Mary, my dear brethren, Mary, my mother and yours, a mother, who, as I believe, is most dear to you, she is this miracle of beauty and purity, so admired by the Almighty that He cries out in exultation: "Thou art all fair, O My love! and there is not a spot in thee;"¹ thou art pure without a single stain, without the least fault or defect in body or soul. In thy body, because, after having brought forth the Son of God, thou didst still remain a virgin, subject to none of the miseries of other women; and thou didst surpass all other mortals in beauty of appearance, and wert endowed with such splendor and majesty that the great St. Denis, who lived in the time of Our Lord, when he saw thee for the first time, almost fell into a grievous error, for if faith had not taught him otherwise, he would have fallen on his knees and adored thee as a divinity.

Most fair in her soul, in which she excels all creatures.

But what concerns the body is of the least importance; if St. Denis could have seen her soul, what would he have thought of it? The soul of Mary is that masterpiece of beauty, in which, according to the holy Fathers, God has shown the greatest skill, since in it He has united all the perfections of all other creatures. I should have the tongue of an angel, my dear brethren, to describe this to you; for the eyes of our minds and our thoughts here in this life are confined in the body, and see only what the senses bring to their knowledge. Yet even the angels were astonished at the first sight of her beauty: "Who is she," they asked each other, "that cometh forth as the morning rising, fair as the moon, bright as the sun?"² They acknowledged that they are but small, twinkling lights in comparison with that brilliant

¹ Tota pulchra es, amica mea, et macula non est in te.—Cant. iv. 7.

² Quæ est ista quæ progreditur quasi aurora consurgens, pulchra ut luna, electa ut sol?—Ibid. vi. 9.

sun of holiness and beauty. For the soul of Mary is so pure, so fair, that not only is she free from all that could sully her, since she was never subject to the least sin, did not inherit the sin of Adam, and hence had no wicked desires and inclinations, and therefore far excels other mortals; but, also, she far surpasses in the gifts of God's grace all the angels and princes of heaven, just as the sun does the stars, and that, too, from the first moment of her conception.

When the holy Fathers and Doctors of the Church come to describe her beauty and sanctity, their sole care is to find words apt to portray it in fitting colors. Most of them lay down their pens in the very beginning, and confess their utter inability to do justice to her in words; therefore we hear them speak in short but graphic phrases, saying that Mary excels in purity and holiness all the heavenly spirits put together; that all the graces that are conferred on the other elect in portions are conferred in a mass on this virgin alone; that after the holiness of God and of His Incarnate Son none greater can be imagined than that of the Blessed Virgin. So say SS. Ephrem, Epiphanius, Jerome, John Chrysostom, Thomas of Aquin, Anselm, Bernard, Bernardine, Bonaventura. St. Bernard, otherwise so eloquent and sweet-tongued, has given us the best and shortest description of Mary's beauty and sanctity: "So great," he says, "is the Virgin's perfection, that God alone knows it thoroughly;"¹ so great that no one who is not God can comprehend it. Why then, O Mary, most beautiful amongst all creatures, should I try to describe thy purity and holiness? Much more reason have I to say with thy servant Bernard: "Thy purity, O Virgin! draws all my affections after it; but speech fails me, words are wanting, when I come to speak of it."² I can then only rejoice and congratulate thee with my whole heart, that, after thy Creator and mine, nothing holier, more beautiful, or purer than thee can be found in heaven or on earth!

But, alas! in what miserable array I behold thee to-day. Thou, so fair, so holy, so pure in body and soul, comest to-day into the temple to fulfil the law of purification! How does that harmonize? Think, O Virgin, of what thou art doing; of how thou art acting contrary to the honor of thy virginal purity and

Shown from
the holy
Fathers.

And yet she
appears as a
miserable
sinner when
she submits
to the law of
purifica-
tion.

¹ Tanta est perfectio Virginis, ut soli Deo cognoscenda reservetur.—S. Bern. Serm. de Concep.

² Totum me trahit affectio; sed oratio deficit.—Ibid.

thy high dignity! My dear brethren, in order better to understand this wonderful concealment and abasement of the purity of Mary, examine with me the law of purification as given to the Jews in the Old Testament. It consisted, as far as women and their offspring were concerned, of two parts, as we read in detail in the Book of Leviticus. First: "If a woman shall bear a man child, she shall be unclean seven days;"¹ that is, as we find further explained in the fifteenth chapter of the same Book, she was separated from all the people; whoever touched her, if only with a finger, was unclean for the whole day; the chair on which she sat was unclean; and even he who touched the least article of furniture belonging to her had to wash himself and his clothing, and was not allowed to appear in the company of decent people until evening. Besides these seven first days, she was obliged, as the text further says, to pass as unclean for thirty days longer. During that time it was not lawful for her to touch anything holy, or to enter the temple, under pain of being excommunicated. At the end of forty days she had to stand at the door of the tabernacle, and, if she were poor, to offer two turtle doves: one as a holocaust, and the other for sin; then the priest prayed for her, and at last she was pronounced clean. Such, my dear brethren, was the law. Now think of this, I beg of you. Mary fulfilled that law; she hid her innocence and holiness under that hideous mantle of sin. Like an unclean woman, the purest and most beautiful of all creatures appears to-day at the door of the temple; like a sinner whose soul is defiled with filth, that virgin who never had the least stain brings her sacrifice for sin!

And that to be like her Son, who also appeared as a sinner in the circumcision.

O Mary, I must again address thee! what art thou doing? Hast thou completely forgotten thyself? Dost thou no longer know what thou art? Can one not approach thee without being sullied; thee who hast borne in thy most chaste body the Most Holy Himself? Darest thou not enter the temple, who carriest in thy arms the Lord of the temple? Must thou be purified? From what? It is only one who is sullied who is in need of cleansing. Dost thou offer for sin? If so, who has sinned? Thou, or thy Son? Thou knowest well who thy Son is; namely, the God of all holiness. Hast thou transgressed? In what, if so? Even thy Child of infinite wisdom can see no spot in thee. What will the world think of this? How will it speak of thy honor? It will pronounce and say that thou art no longer a

¹ Muller, si peperit masculum, immunda erit septem diebus.—*Lev. xii. 2.*

virgin, but an ordinary mother, an unclean woman, a sinner excluded from the temple. O ye angels, what do you think of this? See, "who is she that cometh forth," no longer fair as the moon, bright as the sun, but as a poor, unclean sinner? What can this strange proceeding mean? I know the reason of it, my dear brethren. A short time previous the virginal Mother had seen with astonishment her divine Son take on Himself the appearance of a sinner, and submit to the law of circumcision; she did not wish to seem any better than He, and so, after His example, she came to the temple as an unclean sinner. "Truly, O Blessed Virgin!" so St. Bernard addresses her, "thou hadst no reason or need for purification; but was thy Son in need of circumcision? Be amongst women as one of them, for thy Son also placed Himself in the number of ordinary children."¹ Oh, how thy example puts me and others to shame! We shall consider this to our salutary instruction in the

Second Part.

If I look at myself as I am in the sight of God (so, perhaps, will many have occasion to say with me), oh, what little resemblance I find in myself to that holy Mother! What filth defiles my soul, so that all the waters in the world are not enough to wash it off! Mary is all fair and spotless; but of myself I might say what the Jews said to the blind man whom Our Lord had cured: "Thou wast wholly born in sins."² Truly, I was born in sin; and not only that, but I have grown up wallowing in filth; not forty days, but all the years of my life, nearly, have been spent in sin; I have been wholly deformed in body and soul! Unclean is my memory, my understanding, by hateful images and desires; unclean my heart and mind by foolish love; unclean my eyes by looks cast on unlawful objects; unclean my ears, which have often been opened to hear unlawful discourses; unclean my tongue and mouth by many curses and uncharitable conversations; unclean my hands by injustice and abominable actions; unclean my feet, which have often brought me into dangerous company; unclean my whole body, which has served sin and the devil. "I stick fast in the mire of the deep,"³ I may well

Many are deformed and sullied in body and soul, and yet do not think of purification.

¹ Vere, O beata Virgo, vere non habes causam, nec tibi opus est purificatione; sed numquid Filio tuo opus erat circumcisione? Esto inter mulieres, tanquam una earum; nam et Filius tuus sic est in numero puerorum.—S. Bern. Serm. 3. de Purif. Virg.

² In peccatis natus es totus.—John ix. 34.

³ Infixus sum in limo profundi.—Ps. lxxviii. 3.

sigh forth with David; I am buried in filth above the ears; and yet, although Mary, who was perfectly pure and unspotted, hastened to her purification, I do not yet think of it; I do not yet hasten to do penance, in order to be cleansed from my filthiness: nay, as I cannot hide from the all-seeing eye of God the miserable state in which I am, I try to hide it from the world, and to pass for pious and innocent. What an intolerable hypocrisy!

They are
bemired
with sin,
and yet do
not think of
repenting.

Let us continue this train of thought a little longer, my dear brethren. Enter into yourselves and see whether you have any resemblance to Mary, or whether you have need of purification. We need not waste time on thinking about the comeliness of the body, although we are only too apt, alas! to deck out this food of worms, and to disguise it in all manner of ways, in order to defile our own soul and those of others, as God complains by the Prophet Ezechiel: "Thou hast made thy beauty to be abominable."¹ How stands it with your souls, my dear brethren? Do you find one sin on them? Oh, that is already too much filth! If you were to wash yourselves seven times—nay, seven and seventy times—in the Jordan, like the Syrian Naaman, it would not help you; you might let the Moselle flow bodily over you, and sink yourselves in the depths of the sea, and all that water could not cleanse you. You want tears of sorrow, the repentant tears of a contrite heart! God Himself has prepared for us a bath of His own blood; this alone can take away your uncleanness; hasten to avail yourselves of it! "Wash yourselves, be clean."² Ah, why do we tarry, O sinners! Why do we defer putting away our filth from us? The days of the purification according to the law of Moses were fulfilled for that virgin who was not in need of purification; let the days of our purification according to the law of Christ be also fulfilled, for it is most necessary to us. The woman who brought forth a child was unclean, according to the law; and shall that man or woman not think of purification who has committed so many sins, brought so many monsters into the world? O most guilty conception! O abominable and shameful birth! "Behold, he hath been in labor with injustice," complains the Prophet; "he hath conceived sorrow, and brought forth iniquity."³ See, these are the abortions of sinners: sin, and

¹ Abominabilem fecisti decorem tuum.—Ezech. xvi. 25.

² Lavamini, mundi estote.—Is. i. 16.

³ Ecce parturit iniquitatem, et peperit iniquitatem.—Ps. vii. 25.

the eternal torments and death of the soul in hell that follow sin. Wo to those men who thus bring forth and suckle! Wo to them when that day comes of which Christ has said: "Wo to them that are with child and give suck in those days!"¹ Wo to you, O sinners, if the day of death comes before the day of your purification! What shall then become of your poor souls? Ah, sinners, delay no longer! You have time now, during which God is waiting for your conversion; see that it does not pass by without your repentance and amendment. "Delay not to be converted to the Lord, and defer it not from day to day; for His wrath shall come on a sudden, and in the time of vengeance He will destroy thee."² Perhaps there are for you, as for the Ninivites of old, only forty days left during which God will wait for your purification; nay, this very day the fiat may go forth: "Time shall be no longer."³

And what pleasure or joy do we find in remaining longer in such a wretched state? What more foolish, more deordinate, or more accursed perversity can be imagined? says St. Bonaventure. "You wish everything you have to be clean, but you are not at all concerned about the filthy state of your soul, which is more noble than the heavens."⁴ The clothes you put on must be clean; the bed in which you sleep must be clean; the plate from which you eat must be clean; and yet you bear about such a filthy soul! If your hands are dirty, you do not wait till evening to wash them, you attend to them at once; if you are told that there is a speck of dirt on your face, you run at once to the mirror and wipe it off; but when your conscience reproaches you with the state of your soul, you pay no attention to it. Since yesterday, for the last month, for a year, nay, for many years, it has been unclean and deformed; what does it matter? you say; the day of purification is not yet come; I can allow it to remain in its filth for a while longer; then one washing will make it all right. To no purpose do you have your boots polished in wet weather, if you intend going out again into the street. And so many say: why should I clean my soul, since I intend to drag it along the miry ways of sin for a while longer? "What more

And while they wish all other things to be clean, leave their souls filthy.

¹ *Vae autem pręgnantibus et nutrientibus in illis diebus!*—Matt. xxiv. 19.

² *Non tardes converti ad Dominum, et ne differas de die in diem; subito enim veniet ira illius, et in tempore vindictę disperdet te.*—Eccius. v. 8, 9.

³ *Tempus non erit amplius.*—Apoc. x. 6.

⁴ *Vis habere omnia munda; et animam cęlo nobiliorem, non curas esse immundam.*

accursed perversity can be imagined?"¹ If our bodies are ill; we do not wait long; the stomach is at once cleansed by some medicine. Our only soul is sick and has been ailing for a long time; it is almost in the throes of death, at the last gasp; and yet we do not wish to hear a word about purifying it! "What more desperate perversity can be imagined?"² O sinner, this very day, this hour, in which we behold the purest and most beautiful of virgins standing before the priest with the sacrifice of purification, let us go to the priest, kneel down before our confessor, and lay aside the burden of our sins! "Let not the sun go down on your anger;"³ such is the warning given you by the Apostle. Let not the evening come, I beseech you; let not the sun set on your deformity, your unchastity, your impure love, your injustice, your hatred and anger: in a word, on your sins; do not bring that filthy soul with you to bed; perhaps this very night it may have to lie in the pool of sulphur and brimstone. Let the time of your purification come before the sun sets.

Still they wish to appear good and innocent.

But why do I take such trouble to urge you to repent? If I question all in order, I shall hardly find one who is unclean; no one has done evil; all are innocent and holy! O guilt well concealed! This, my dear brethren, is what is so intolerable in most people; they will not, like Mary, hasten to be purified; and as she eagerly sought to hide her purity and beauty under the cloak of sin, they endeavor to conceal their guilt under the cloak of innocence, so as to appear pious before the world. Of them St. Bernard says, with reason: "There are men who wish to seem good, and not to be so; and not to seem wicked, and to be so;"⁴ "Having an appearance indeed of godliness, but denying the power thereof."⁵ Outwardly they are good; in their hearts they are but cheats; great sinners as they are, yet innocence shines forth in their eyes, on their forehead, their lips, in their whole demeanor. Their hearts may be blacker than coal with the mire of sin; outwardly they go forth clad in the white robe of innocence, as if they belonged to that happy band clad in white garments that St. John saw standing before the Lamb: "Clothed

¹ Quid detestabilis?

² Quid desperatius?

³ Sol non occidat super iracundiam vestram.—Eph. iv. 26.

⁴ Sunt qui boni videri, non esse; mali non videri, et esse volunt.—S. Bern. Serm. 66, in Cant.

⁵ Habentes speciem quidem pietatis, virtutem autem ejus abnegantes.—II. Tim. iii. 5.

with white robes.”¹ They go to church like others; they hear sermons like others, “feigning long prayer;” but in reality they are guilty of injustice: “who devour the houses of widows;”² full of sin, they oppress and persecute the widow, the orphan, the desolate. Do you wish to hear what they have to say for themselves? I am innocent, they say with Pilate. If they are upbraided with any vice by way of warning, they answer: Are not all manner of injustices committed in the world nowadays? My profession requires me to act as I do. My predecessors were pious men, and they did as I do. What impure conversations are indulged in, what unchaste amusements practised, what liberties taken with the good name of others! And what great sins all those are! Oh, what sins! they exclaim; I wish I had nothing else to answer for! It is not forbidden to laugh and enjoy one’s self! If the talk is begun, must I sit there silent, as if I did not know how to speak? If scandal is taken by some, what is that to us? they say, like the high-priests of the Jews. Let every man look to himself; it is not my fault; that was not my object in starting the topic. What curses, maledictions, imprecations are heard in many houses the whole day long! Are they not sins? Eh! they exclaim; I do not mean it in that sense; it is only a habit with me; I am not in earnest; I must swear in order to keep the unruly people in the house in order. To lie, cheat, despise good, approve of evil, not chastise the vices one sees in those subject to him, and to encourage those under his authority to do more evil; are not those things sins? Oh, no! God will not look on them in that light; we must do them in order to keep peace and harmony. To vilify, abuse, hate, persecute, seek and take revenge; are not those things sins? No; I am forced to do them; my honor requires it. See, my dear brethren, how well we know how to excuse ourselves; so we go about, clad in the robe of a false innocence; we esteem ourselves clean, although we have committed more sins than there are hairs on our heads. We delude ourselves with the idea that we are pious and holy, no matter how loud the voice of conscience is to the contrary. Many a one, in order to give more scope to his evil desires, seeks for all sorts of pretexts to persuade himself that this or that is no sin, or at all events not a mortal sin; all their thoughts and cogitations tend only “to make excuses

¹ *Amicti stolis albis.*—Apoc. vii. 9.

² *Simulantes longam orationem, qui devorant domos viduarum.*—Luke xx. 47.

in sins;”¹ to find out how this or that may be left out of the number of sins, and actually raised to the rank of a virtue. Anger and vindictiveness must be called pious zeal; avarice, necessary parsimony; impurity, agreeable friendship; and at last things get so far that one may say: to commit sin and lead a bad life is only the fashion.

Or they put
the blame
on others.

If the action cannot be excused from sin, then the effort is made to shift the blame from themselves on to others. Sometimes three or four children are playing together in a room; one of them happens to break a pane of glass; the mother runs in at once and asks who did the mischief. But she may ask long before she finds out! One says: my brother did it. No, says the other, you are telling a fib; you did it yourself; and so the dispute is kept up for half an hour, and at the end no one is more guilty than the other. No wonder! We have learned the trick from our first parents. After the first sin was committed God came into Paradise and called Adam: “Where art thou?”² What hast thou done? Why? What have I done? “The woman whom Thou gavest me to be my companion gave me of the tree, and I did eat.” She put the apple in my hand, and I could not help myself. “And the Lord God said to the woman: Why hast thou done this? And she answered: The serpent deceived me, and I did eat.”³ The world is just the same in our own days; the blame is shifted off on another; every one wishes to appear pure and innocent. A bad companion has led me astray, says one; she enticed me, says another; I should never have thought of it if the other had not begun it. At last we are unable to find any excuse, and then we have to put the fault on the serpent. The devil is to blame; oh, how the wicked fiend has deceived me! and so on. I do not indeed wish to advocate the devil’s cause to-day, my dear brethren; that wily foe is only too diligent in seeking to injure our souls; but I know, nevertheless, that he is not so much to blame as people say. He can suggest and urge on, but cannot compel any one to sin. Therefore, O sinner! if you wish to act honestly with your God, acknowledge the truth humbly, and say with the penitent David: “It is I

¹ Ad excusandas excusationes in peccatis.—Ps. cxi. 4.

² Ubi es?—Gen. iii. 9.

³ Muller, quam dedisti mihi sociam, dedit mihi de ligno, et comedi. Et dixit Dominus Deus ad mulierem: quare hoc fecisti? Quæ respondit: serpens decepit me, et comedi.—Ibid. 12, 13.

that have sinned; I have done wickedly.”¹ No one but I am to blame for having consented to that bad thought; for having committed that act of injustice, etc. My own will is to blame. Then you will speak the truth.

But ah, would to God that this cloak of our deformity were not sometimes brought even into the confessional, and that we did not either through shame, or not to seem wicked, conceal, lessen, palliate, or excuse our sins, so that the confessor cannot reach the bottom of our malice; as if we could hide anything from the all-seeing eye of God, and prevent Him from looking into our consciences! Oh, no! that cannot be done. You may deceive men in this particular; you may make yourself out innocent in their eyes, although you were the worst man on earth; but to no purpose would you seek to cloak your malice from the eye of God, who sees the secrets of the heart, and to whom you are thoroughly known, inwardly and outwardly. Now He keeps silent for a while, and bears with your hypocrisy; but the time will come of which He says by the Prophet Sophonias: “And it shall come to pass that I will visit upon all such as are clothed with strange apparel.”² I will tear the mask from their faces, and then heaven and earth shall know what wickedness was hidden under their assumed piety. How you will then blush for shame, O sinners, who are now ashamed to acknowledge candidly your transgressions to one man who occupies the place of God! What confusion will be felt when the nature of each one’s life shall be brought to light! See that man; what an honorable man he seemed to be! That woman, who always appeared so devout in church! etc. And yet they were all wicked, impious, and unjust. Now we are apt to complain if the least suffering is sent us: Oh, what have I done that God should torment me so! Truly, I cannot tell you what you have done; but God will make everything clear to you, and show that you deserved a thousand times more trials than you had; then you will know how unjust was your complaint. I advise you to be silent now and bear your suffering with patience.

Nay, even in confession they hide their guilt.

O sinners, before the cloak of false innocence is dragged off by the Almighty, to our great shame, let us in all humility acknowledge before Him what we are! On this day on which the most pure and beautiful Virgin did not hesitate to pass as a sinful,

Resolution to confess our sins candidly, and be

¹ Ego sum qui peccavi; ego inique egi.—II. Kings xxiv. 17.

² Et erit visitabo super omnes, qui induti sunt veste peregrina.—Soph. i. 8.

cleansed
from them
at once.

miserable woman, we who are sinful in reality must not any longer try to conceal our filthiness, but candidly declare it with all the sincerity of our hearts, without excuse or palliation, before God and the priest; and let us say with the Prophet: "I said" I am determined "to confess against myself my injustice to the Lord."¹ I have sinned, and cannot deny it; Thou knowest, O Lord, what I have done! I am not worthy to be called Thy child. See, O Lord, in what mire my soul is buried! But through Thy most pure Mother give me tears of sincere repentance, that I may cleanse my soul, hate and detest sin, and in future serve and please Thee alone and Thy most pure Mother, with a true love, and a pure heart and soul. Amen.

THIRTY-THIRD SERMON.

ON THE CONFORMITY OF MARY TO THE DIVINE WILL DURING HER WHOLE LIFE.

Subject.

Mary the most perfect image of the most perfect conformity with and resignation to the will of God.—*Preached on the feast of the Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary.*

Text.

Quinimmo, beati qui audiunt verbum Dei, et custodiant illud.
—Luke xi. 28.

"Yea rather, blessed are they who hear the word of God, and keep it."

Introduction.

Happy beyond all doubt is she to whom in preference to all mortals was granted the great honor and favor of bearing Jesus, the Son of God, for nine months in her womb, and bringing Him forth for the salvation of the world; therefore with good reason did that woman in the gospel of to-day say to Our Lord: "Blessed is the womb that bore Thee." But, according to the testimony of Christ, he alone is really blessed who hears the word of God, and keeps it; that is, as I have explained on another occasion, who knows the will of God, and fulfils it in all circumstances with contented heart; for of such a one Jesus Christ says in the Gospel of St.

¹ Dixi; confitebor adversum me injustitiam meam Domino.—Ps. xxxi. 5.

Matthew: “Whosoever shall do the will of My Father that is in heaven, he is My brother, and sister, and mother,”¹ no matter who he may be; that is, I will hold him in as great esteem as if he were My own brother, or sister, or mother. But, my dear brethren, is Mary, then, excluded by those words, so as to be less esteemed by Christ? Not at all. But He wished to show the chief reason why Mary is the most happy of all; for she is most dear to Him, not so much because she is His Mother, but rather because amongst all men on earth and angels in heaven there was none found who so well knew the will of God, and fulfilled it so readily, as she did. And so it is in reality; from her earliest years, when as a child three years old she offered herself in the temple to the perpetual service of the Lord, her will was united completely, in the most perfect manner, with the divine will, as I shall now show.

Plan of Discourse.

Mary is the most perfect image of the most perfect conformity with and resignation to the will of God. Such is the whole subject of this panegyric.

Most Blessed Virgin! profit enough shall we have from it if we only endeavor to follow thee even afar off in the practice of this virtue. Obtain for us the grace to do so from thy divine Son, through the hands of our holy angels, that we, too, may be in the number of those of whom thy dear Son has said: “Yea rather, blessed are they who hear the word of God, and keep it.”

That the Blessed Virgin during her whole life was of all mere creatures the most perfect model of conformity with the divine will, namely, that in every circumstance she fulfilled the known will of God in the most perfect manner: that is so clear that we need not spend much time in examining the question or proving it; for it is certain that **Mary**, the holiest of all the saints, never acted against the will of God, even by the least venial sin or the least imperfection. Nay, as theologians say, on account of the great light and knowledge with which that illustrious soul was endowed by God, on account of the superabundance of graces by which she was strengthened, on account of the intensity of the love of God which inflamed her above all the seraphim, it was for her a moral impossibility to do anything which she might

Mary did the will of God most perfectly in all things.

¹ *Quicumque fecerit voluntatem Patris mei qui in caelis est, ipse meus frater, et soror, et mater e. r. — Matt. xii. 50.*

suspect as being even remotely contrary to the divine will. Hence it is a damnable error of heretics to affirm that the Blessed Virgin committed any faults, that she had to repent of them and confess them to the apostle St. John. No; she was never capable of receiving the sacrament of penance, for she never did anything that she could be sorry or do penance for.

Moreover, she was always in conformity with the will of God; when the Incarnation was announced to her;

To-day I wish to speak only of the complete conformity and resignation of her will to the will of God. "Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it done to me according to thy word;" such was the expression by which she gave herself entirely to the divine will and pleasure. And what power this offering of herself had! For then that truth was fulfilled: "And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us." So that two most wonderful, and, for us mortals, most beneficial mysteries—the incarnation of God and the redemption of the world—were the effects of Mary's resignation to the will of God. But we shall not dwell long on this; otherwise you might in thought object, and say: What wonder is it that she should agree to co-operate in such a beneficent ordination of the Almighty? It was an easy thing for her to agree to become the Mother of God; there was not a virgin or woman of her time who would not have gladly accepted the same honor. We have far more bitter morsels to swallow, that Divine Providence has prepared for us; and it is a far more difficult matter to accept them and be resigned to them readily and willingly. True, my dear brethren; but after all, had the Mother of God no hardship to suffer, in bearing which she showed the conformity of her will with that of God? Let us consider her life, although the least part of it is known to us.

When Joseph was thinking of putting her away;

Was it not hard for her to see how Joseph, her spouse, knowing her to be pregnant, and not understanding the cause, had determined on abandoning her, a fact that could not have been concealed from her, for she must have remarked his agitation? One word from her would have sufficed to set matters right, if she had been willing to reveal the divine mysteries; but she did not wish to give so much consideration to herself; she left all to the arrangement of Providence. "Be it done," she doubtless said to herself; happen what may, as long as the will of God be done; let Joseph think of me what he pleases; let him leave me, if such is the will of God. But, most holy Virgin! if Joseph had really carried out his intention of abandoning thee, what would have been the result? Thou shouldst have been regarded

by all decent people as a dishonored woman, a guilty adulteress, and wouldst have lost thy good name! No matter; let it be so, if such is the will of God! And, according to the law, which was not unknown to thee, thou shouldst probably have been stoned to death publicly! "Be it done!" I am a handmaid of the Lord, ready for all He may decree for me; let the will of God be done in me; I resign myself to His decrees, and give myself into His hands, come of it what may!

Was it not a hard thing for that tender virgin, in the depth of winter, to set out on that weary journey to Bethlehem; and, when she arrived in that town, to be shut out of all the inns, and be forced to seek shelter in a stable in the open field, or, as others maintain, in a cave of wild beasts, where there was neither fire nor hearth, bed nor bedding; and there she had to dwell for some time? Consider how disagreeable it is for a traveller who has lost his way to be obliged to take shelter in the hut of a poor peasant, where he cannot find, even for money, a piece of good bread or a drink of fresh water. And yet his discomfort lasts but one night. How, then, must it have been with that poor virgin under the circumstances? And yet the one thought, It is the will of God, was more than enough to make her endure it all with joy of heart, and to force her to say: Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it done to me according to His holy will!

Was it not a hard thing for her, later on, to learn that even this wretched shelter was not to be granted to her only-begotten, most beloved, and divine Son, and that Herod sought Him out to put Him to death? Thus she was obliged to set out in the middle of the night with her child, and, ignorant as she was of the road, to go away into the strange land of Egypt, where she could not hope to find a soul who knew her; where the inhabitants were all idolaters, who served the devil, and from whom, nevertheless, she would be forced to ask for some corner for shelter. Nor did she know how long she would have to remain there, or how she was to return. What would you think, my dear brethren, if a mother were thus banished from her native town with her little ones, and sent, I will not say into Turkey, among the infidels, but into another Christian, Catholic country, where she is utterly unknown, and has not a foot of ground she can call her own? Would it not be a great thing for her to imitate the resignation of Mary, and to submit to her fate with full conformity to the divine will?

When her
Son was
born in the
stable:

When she
had to fly
with Him to
Egypt:

When He was made to suffer and die so cruelly.

But all we have hitherto seen is nothing compared to the bitter trial that Divine Providence caused the Blessed Virgin to endure when she was obliged to look on at the passion and death of her Son. Who can describe the anguish that then tortured her motherly heart! The Prophet Jeremias compares it to the salt sea: "Great as the sea is thy destruction."¹ The aged Simeon calls it a sharp sword, which should even pierce her soul, as he prophesied to her in the temple: "Thy own soul a sword shall pierce."² Nor could it be otherwise; for if we must judge of the compassion and pity in one who loves by the greatness of the love and the knowledge of the pain suffered by the loved one, as experience teaches, and as all who truly love well know (we do not feel troubled at the sorrows of another if we have no affection for him; and our trouble is in proportion to our love; nor does the affliction of another cause us any grief if we know not of it; and the clearer our knowledge of that affliction, the greater is our grief thereat), then, indeed, the sufferings of the Blessed Virgin must have been incomparably and incomprehensibly great. For who can understand the greatness of her love! All motherly affection must yield to hers in intensity; no mother can ever love her child as this Mother loved her divine Son; for there can never be a more beautiful or amiable child than Jesus, nor a better or more tender-hearted mother than Mary. What grief, then, must have arisen out of that love on account of the almost infinite sufferings of such a son!

She knew of and saw all this.

If she had known nothing of those sufferings, or had but a doubtful, uncertain knowledge of them, then fear and trouble would not have transfixed her heart with such great pain. But great as her love was, equally clear was her knowledge of what, how, when, and at whose hands her dearest Son was so cruelly tortured. She herself had seen with her own eyes, and heard how they dragged Him along, bound with ropes and chains like a murderer or robber, in a most unmerciful manner, through the public streets, urging Him on with blows; how He was given over to the wantonness of the rabble for a whole night, who out of diabolical malice blindfolded Him, tore out His hair, spat upon Him, and gave Him one buffet in the face after another. Judge, my dear brethren, if you can, of her anguish when she heard, or, we may say, felt in herself, the cruel stripes inflicted on Him, which

¹ Magna est velut mare contritio tua.—Lam. ii. 13.

² Tuam ipsius animam pertransibit gladius.—Luke ii. 35.

mangled and tore her own flesh and blood, that is, the most tender body of her Son, for such a long time; imagine you behold that almost infinitely loving Mother, standing in the court of Pilate's house, looking at her own Son streaming with blood, crowned with thorns, His whole body one wound, clothed with miserable rags, no longer bearing the aspect of a human being, and exhibited as a spectacle to the people from an elevated place, and presented to them by Pilate with the words: "Behold the Man!" in the hope of moving the embittered Jews to mercy. O sorrowful Virgin! suffering Mother! what were thy feelings on the occasion? Behold the Man! Dost thou still know who He is? Behold the Man! Is He thy Son? O anguish! And what more will they do to Him? Hear the ungrateful people crying out into thy ears: "Away with Him, away with Him, crucify Him!"¹ See how sentence is pronounced on Him, and He is given over to the death of the cross!

Humanly speaking, the Blessed Virgin must have lost consciousness, and died with grief, had not the mighty hand of God preserved her for greater sufferings. These we can form some idea of, if we accompany her in spirit as she goes with the multitude of people to see the end. For a mother, and such a mother, to see her son, and such a son, so cruelly treated, that even the rocks and stones were rent with pity; to see Him carrying His own cross, and falling down exhausted under the weight of it; to see Him bound hand and foot, and fastened with coarse nails to the cross; and not to be able to help Him! To see her Son hanging on the gibbet, mocked at and blasphemed, and not to be able to whisper a word of consolation to Him! To hear Him complain of thirst, and to be able to offer Him nothing but her salt tears, and that, too, from a distance! To hear the last words with which He said adieu to her, with bleeding lips and glassy eyes, giving her over and recommending her to another! To see the only consolation of her eyes, closing His, and giving up the ghost, and finally lying in her lap as a mangled corpse! O sorrow, let him who can understand thee! Holy Virgin, Mother of Sorrows, well art thou called the Queen of Martyrs, for all that thy divine Son suffered in His body thou didst suffer in thy soul, and to such a degree that St. Bernard does not hesitate to say: "So

When He
was cruci-
fied.

¹ Tolle, tolle, crucifige eum!—John xix. 15.

great was the sorrow of the Virgin, that if it were divided among all creatures they would die at once."¹

All of which pain Mary suffered with complete resignation.

But how did Mary bear this incomprehensible martyrdom? O afflicted souls, turn your eyes to her in all attacks of adversity that the divine decree sends you! From her you may learn how to bear them, and to resign your will to them! Although she had never merited the least suffering, never had the least share in original sin, and had always been the most innocent and holy among all mere creatures; yet she accepted her trials with humble and most ready acquiescence to the will of God, always repeating in her heart her favorite words: "Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it done to me according to thy word!" My sorrow is vast as the sea; my sufferings more bitter than death; a sword has pierced my soul; be it done to me, O Lord, according to Thy will! If my Son wishes to drink the bitter chalice, I am no better than He, and therefore I do not wish to have my share of it taken from me.

With the utmost meekness and patience.

She suffered with the utmost patience and meekness, nay, with the desire of feeling more and more the sufferings of her Son. In similar circumstances, if their children were being led out to death, other mothers would have concealed themselves at home; either through shame, if they belonged to a respectable family, or through excessive grief, and would have found it impossible to be present at the execution of their children. This we see in many cases: if there is question of opening a small ulcer, or otherwise operating on a child, the mother runs out of the room at the first appearance of the doctor, so as not to add to her sorrow by witnessing the pain suffered by her child. Mary, on the contrary, did not wish to spare herself so far; she stood in the midst of the torturers who treated her Son so cruelly; she followed Him as He was dragged along the streets; she went with Him to the summit of the mountain, and kept at His side when He came to the place of execution: "Now there stood by the cross of Jesus His Mother,"² as St. John says. She did not turn her eyes away from Him, and considered attentively all His wounds, that she might thus have in her soul a livelier image of the sufferings of her Son. Many other mothers, if obliged to be present at such a spectacle, would either lose consciousness, or fill the place with

¹ *Tantus fuit dolor Virginis, quod si in omnes creaturas divideretur, omnes subito interirent.*

² *Stabant juxta crucem Jesu mater ejus.—John xix. 25.*

their moans and lamentations, tearing their hair and giving every sign of despair. How a mother weeps and wails if her little child dies suddenly, although she has more reason to rejoice, since she knows that the little one is in heaven! But "there stood by the cross of Jesus Mary, His Mother," immovable; except her tears and silent sighs, there was in her no sign of murmuring, no inordinate movement, no loud wail of sorrow; she was completely wrapped up in her sentiments of love and compassion for her Son. And for that reason those painters make a great mistake who represent her as falling into a faint in the arms of St. John at the foot of the cross; the Evangelist tells us the contrary: she stood, and did not fall down. Many other mothers, if they could avenge their child in no other manner, would have assailed the executioners with reproaches, revilings, and curses. We see that to be the case if the father sometimes wishes to chastise his child, even when the little one deserves it; the mother at once begins to shout and cry louder than the child himself; do you mean to kill the child? she says; do you want to put an end to him? How did Mary act towards the murderers and torturers of her Son? Did she call on the eternal Father to punish those cruel, wicked, and ungrateful men with a sudden death? No; she rather prayed with her Son: "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."¹ Nay, says St. Antoninus, the Blessed Virgin was so united with the will of God in the sufferings of her Son that, if the heavenly Father had required it for the redemption, and given her but a sign of His pleasure to that effect, she herself would have been ready, as Abraham was with his son Isaac, to set to work with her own hands, and although to her great grief, nail her Son to the cross, and sacrifice Him. What do you think of it now, my dear brethren? Was not that a bitter morsel that Divine Providence gave her to swallow? Could it well have been more bitter? And therefore could she have given greater proof of her conformity with the will of God?

Why, then, should we inquire into the later life of the Blessed Virgin? There is no doubt that it was hard for her to see Jesus, her Son, ascending into heaven with the great multitude of the elect, among whom was the soul of St. Joseph, her spouse, and for her to be obliged to part from Him and to remain in the world. It must have been very hard, I say, when we consider all the circumstances of the case. Her burning love for her Son

This conformity she showed after the death of her Son till the end of her life.

¹ *Pater, dimitte illis, non enim sciunt quid faciunt.*—Luke xxiii. 34.

and ardent desire to be always with Him, coupled with the necessity of being separated from Him for such a long time, must have been very hard for a soul that had such a clear knowledge of God as the Blessed Virgin possessed; and the pain she felt must have been much greater than we poor mortals can imagine; it is a pain similar to that which makes the souls in purgatory suffer so much. To be left behind in the world, the vale of tears, which is only a land of misery, to where the children of Adam are banished for a time to pay the debt contracted by sin, a debt in which Mary had not the slightest share; to be still banished from heaven, which she had merited countless times from the first moment of her conception, and that for so many years; for the Mother of God (if it be true, as authors say, that she was seventy years old) must have lived twenty-five years on earth after the death of her Son; that, I repeat, must have been hard indeed! How did not the apostle Paul sigh and moan: "I am straitened . . . having a desire to be dissolved and to be with Christ."¹ "Unhappy man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?"² And how other pious souls sighed in the words of David to depart soon for the heavenly country: "When shall I come and appear before the face of God?"³ Is it likely, then, that this holy virgin, who was filled with ardent charity, should feel less of a desire to come to her God? Could not Christ have taken her with Him at once in His ascension? Could not Mary have asked that favor of her Son, either to accompany Him at once, or to go to Him soon after His departure from this world? And if she had made such a request, can we imagine that such a son would have denied it to such a mother? But she had learned from her Son to pray in another fashion: "Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven;" "Not as I will, but as Thou wilt."⁴ If I have to remain banished still longer in this vale of tears, be it done to me according to thy word; I do not wish to be released unless when and as it may please Thee, my God!

And thus puts our spirit of discontent to shame.

O Mary, most perfect model of conformity with and resignation to the will of God, how we must feel ashamed when we consider thee! Thou, the Queen of heaven and earth, the Mother of the Most High, the holiest and most innocent of all the angels and men that God has created, thou didst resign thyself to the di-

¹ *Conrector . . . desiderium habens dissolvi, et esse cum Christo.*—*Philipp. i. 23.*

² *Infelix ego homo! quis me liberabit de corpore mortis hujus?*—*Rom. vii. 24.*

³ *Quando veniam et apparebo ante faciem Dei?*—*Ps. xli. 3.*

⁴ *Non sicut ego volo, sed sicut tu.*—*Matt. xxvi. 39.*

vine will in such hard and bitter trials; and we poor sinners, who know that we have deserved all the chastisements of the world, nay, the eternal fire of hell, for our sins, we try to persuade ourselves that a great wrong is done us if the hand of God chooses to try us with a cross! Thou, the Gate of heaven, hast not been able to enter heaven without suffering, and suffering grievously; nor hast thou wished to enter otherwise; and we, the children of reprobation, dare to imagine that we can enter the same heaven on a path strewn with roses, without feeling any thorns! Thou hast borne thy grievous trials with ready resignation of thy will to Divine Providence, and hast suffered patiently till death; we often cannot and will not submit to a slight contradiction, and murmur at and complain of it, as if we were innocence itself! Thou couldst, if thou hadst wished, have freed thyself from much suffering, and have done it by one word, yet, without a syllable of opposition, thou hast allowed the divine will to rule and order thee as it pleased; and we are not willing for the sake of God and heaven to bear patiently the sufferings that we know we cannot avoid with all our efforts! Ah, how unlike such a mother we, her children, are!

What else, then, have we to do but by humble and daily prayer to beg of her to obtain this necessary virtue for us? Oh, beseech, then, thy divine Son to grant us true conformity of our will with His, that in all things we may do what God wills, when He wills, as He wills, because He wills; so that in all circumstances and events, be they sweet or sour, we may, after thy example, satisfied with the divine ordinance, think and say: Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it done to me according to Thy word. Behold in me a servant of the Lord; may His holy will be done in me! May the will of God be done in me in health and sickness, in joy and sorrow, in good fortune and adversity, in wealth and poverty, in life and death, on earth and in heaven! Thy will be done, O Lord, in and by me, as Mary, the Mother of Thy Son, always fulfilled it! Amen.

Prayer to
Mary to ob-
tain con-
formity
with the
will of God.

THIRTY-FOURTH SERMON.

ON THE DEATH AND ASSUMPTION OF MARY.

Subject.

The death of Mary was a joyful one: 1. Owing to the consideration of the past. 2. Owing to the thought of the future. —*Preached on the feast of the Assumption.*

Text.

Assumpta est Maria in cælum; gaudent angeli. (From the office of the day.)

“Mary is assumed into heaven; the angels rejoice.”

Introduction.

It was a source of great joy for the angels to receive on this day into heaven their Queen, whose beauty they had so often wondered at, and of whom they said to each other: “Who is she that cometh forth as the morning rising, fair as the moon, bright as the sun?”¹ It is a great source of joy for men to know that their Mother is sent on to heaven to act as their advocate with her Son. But for no one was it a greater cause of joy than for Mary herself to die and leave this world, and be taken up into heaven. To-day we must not speak of the bitterness and pain of death; for in and of her death nothing can be or can be said but what is joyful, and what I have to say about it now shall be in the same strain.

Plan of Discourse.

The joyful death of Mary; such is the subject of this meditation. Joyful in the remembrance of the past: the first point. Joyful in the thought of the future: the second point. What shall our death be like: the final consideration. The former to the glory of Mary, and by way of congratulating her on her great happiness; the latter to our instruction.

O glorious Virgin, and you angels who exulted in her triumphal entry, grant us a share in your joy, and especially the grace so to live that we, too, may have reason to rejoice in the hour of death!

¹ *Quæ est ista quæ progreditur quasi aurora consurgens, pulchra ut luna, electa ut sol?* —Cant. vi. 9.

The greatest happiness for the soldier in war time is to see the enemy take to flight, and know that he can now, free from all danger of wounds and death, enjoy his well-earned booty; although he has seen many of his comrades bite the dust during the heat of the engagement. The Israelites never experienced greater happiness than when they were released from the heavy yoke of the Egyptians, and saw their enemies drowned in the Red Sea. Let us be glad, they cried out, full of exultation; let us sing to the glory of God: "Let us sing to the Lord, for He is gloriously magnified; the horse and the rider He hath thrown into the sea."¹ Never do the souls of just and pious servants of God experience greater joy on earth than at the hour of death, and at their entry into eternity; for then, at the end of a dangerous strife, they turn the eyes of their minds on the past, and see how this vale of tears and misery is no more to them, and how all trouble and suffering, toil and labor, sickness and adversity, mortification and penance, cares and fears, have disappeared forever for them. Most especially do they rejoice when they look back and see the good works and acts of virtue they have performed during their lives, so that they can console themselves with the reflection of the Apostle, and say: "The time of my dissolution is at hand;" praised be God! "I have fought a good fight; I have finished my course; I have kept the faith;" during my life I have faithfully served my God, and fulfilled all He required of me; "As to the rest, there is laid up for me a crown of justice, which the Lord, the just Judge, will render to me in that day;"² now I can expect my reward. Depart, my soul; go to thy Creator and to eternal rest. True, indeed, are the words of the Psalmist: "Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints."³ True, indeed, are the words of Our Lord Himself: "If any man keep My word, he shall not see death forever;"⁴ that is, the servant of God will never experience or feel the bitterness of death, the very thought of which now fills many a one, and especially the wicked, with terror. It is not easy to persuade sinners that the just lead peaceful and happy lives in this world; but no one who has right reason and true faith can doubt that their end is peaceful and

All the just generally die a joyful death.

¹ Cantemus Domino; gloriose enim magnificatus est, equum et ascensorem dejecit in mare.—Ex. xv. 1.

² Tempus resolutionis meæ instat; bonum certamen certavi, cursum consummavi, fidem servavi. In reliquo reposita est mihi corona justitiæ, quam reddet mihi Dominus in illa die justus iudex.—II. Tim. iv. 6-8.

³ Pretiosa in conspectu Domini mors sanctorum ejus.—Ps. cxv. 15.

⁴ Si quis sermonem meum servaverit, mortem non videbit in æternum.—John viii. 51.

quiet. Hence the most wicked, even though they do not live like the good, would certainly wish to die like them. And hence we often hear people saying, when speaking of the death of a good and holy person: Oh, how I wish I could die like him!

But it is not happy in the consideration of the past.

Happy is the death of the just in the consideration of the past; but it is not so for all; for how few there are, even among the saints, who, when they look back on the past, do not find something or other which they have reason to bewail and repent of! How few who can say truthfully with Job: "My heart doth not reprehend me in all my life"¹ I am not conscious of having committed a single fault against the law of God. If, says St. Augustine, we were to bring all the faithful servants of God together, and ask them, one after the other, whether they think they were always free from all sin; what answer would they give? No matter how great their sanctity, they would all have to humbly acknowledge with St. John: "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us."² Now, to have ever offended God, not to have loved God with all our heart, to have omitted anything through carelessness, oh, what a troublesome thought that is for the soul about to depart into eternity, when it is about to see God and His beauty and majesty for the first time! If the blessed in heaven were subject to sadness or trouble, according to the holy Fathers there would be no more cruel hell than heaven itself; if the blessed could think with regret of the little love they had during life for the infinite Good, of how unworthy the love they gave Him was of His dignity and excellence, and of how often they offended Him, this consideration would cause them as much sorrow as they actually enjoy love and happiness in God. Their displeasure and despair would be greater than that of the mother who, on recovering the use of her senses, learns that in a fit of madness she has killed her only-beloved son. Now, although God will keep such sorrowful reflections from the just soul, as well in the moment of death as afterwards in heaven, yet there is no doubt that they have far greater joy and consolation who are not conscious of any fault, who have never neglected the divine service in the least, and who have always done as much as they could for God, and loved Him as fervently as possible.

¹ Neque enim reprehendit me cor meum in omni vita mea.—Job xxvii. 6.

² Si dixerimus quoniam peccatum non habemus, ipsi nos seducimus, et veritas in nobis non est.—I. John i. 8.

Mary, and Mary alone, could boast of this consolation, this perfect joy in the hour of her death, for she far excelled all men and angels in every grace. It is a certain truth, handed down to us from the Fathers, and confirmed by the decree of the Council of Trent, that Mary never committed even the least venial sin; let Calvin and other heretics say what they will, and do their worst to blacken her fame, and maintain that she was guilty of curiosity, vainglory, culpable ignorance, and weak faith. It is an undoubted truth that she left this world as pure, innocent, and unstained as she was conceived; that she never acted contrary to the divine will in the least, and therefore that she could not accuse herself of any negligence, tepidity, or inconsiderateness. What happiness, O God of infinite goodness, never to have offended Thee! A joy than which none could be greater for us poor mortals, although it is one that we should in vain hope for or desire; and yet it was only a small part of the excessive happiness and glory of this most blessed Virgin!

Not only had she never lost the grace of God, never been sullied by the least inordinate desire, but she never allowed the grace of God to remain idle in her soul. Her whole life was a constant pursuit of merit; her heart a burning fire of the most tender and perfect love of God, as St. Peter Damian says, a love in which she was never disturbed by distractions and vain thoughts, and which was never interrupted by fatigue, weakness, pain, or sadness; a love that, according to St. Ambrose, did not cease even during her sleep, for even then she enjoyed the full use of her reason; so that during her whole life she never performed a single natural act that was not worthy of heaven; not a word fell from her lips that did not tend to the honor and glory of God; not a thought of her mind that was not directed to a supernatural end; not a moment of her time was lost without making fresh progress in virtue and new gain for eternity. And how much did she gain? Ah, who can say that, or understand it! If, according to the teaching of theologians, the greatness of the merit of every good work is measured according to the amount of sanctifying grace in the soul, and if this grace is increased by every good work; if, therefore, as that grace increases, the merit grows greater and greater always: what master of calculation by all his adding and multiplying can tell us the number and greatness of the merits that Mary amassed during her life of sixty, or, as others maintain, more than seventy years! Do you, O angels! undertake

Only the death of Mary was happy in the thought that she had never sinned in the least.

And had amassed countless merits.

this task, if you can; it is too difficult for us; we cannot measure the greatness of the merits of Mary, who, according to the testimony of the holy Fathers, received as the future Mother of God, in the first moment of her conception, greater graces than all the angels and saints put together; of that virgin who, in the first moment of her conception, was endowed with the full use of reason, and who loved God according to the measure of the grace given to her, and never ceased to love Him for one moment, with all her strength, as far as was possible for her. What a fathomless ocean of merits her soul must have possessed in the last moment of her life! And therefore how indescribably great must not her joy have been in that moment!

Hence her
joy must
have been
perfect.

My dear brethren, if even blind heathens have acknowledged that in this life a good conscience gives consolation enough to assuage the greatest pain, and to bring comfort in the utmost distress, how must it have been with the heart of the dying Mary, when she looked back on her past life, in which she found nothing that was culpable, nothing imperfect, nothing that was not meritorious in the highest degree possible for her? O consolation, O joy, that is all I can say of thee. Yet I am glad I am not able to describe its greatness and abundance, for thou, O most dear and holy Virgin! wert alone among all mere creatures worthy of this consolation, since thou alone hast merited to have this joy in thy departure from earth. Therefore the angels rejoice with thee in heaven, and with and on account of thee men on earth also rejoice! Thus joyful, my dear brethren, was the death of Mary in the consideration of the past; but she superabounded with joy in the consideration of the future state that awaited her, nay, in which she had already begun to exist: as we shall see in the

Second Part.

It was in-
creased by
the thought
of her glory
in heaven.

“As for the rest, there is laid up for me a crown of justice, which the Lord, the just Judge, will render to me in that day.” This was the thought that consoled St. Paul while still in the vigor of life, amid the countless persecutions and contradictions he had to suffer; he was comforted by the mere distant anticipation of the glory that awaited him as the reward of only half of his life, for during the first part of it he had been a persecutor of Christ. This thought so encouraged him that he looked on all his trials as mere pleasures, and he cried out: “I am filled

with comfort: I exceedingly abound with joy in all our tribulation.”¹ How must it then have been with the most holy soul of Mary when she saw the crown of glory, no longer at a distance, but, as it were, already resting on her head at the close of her life? What sort of a crown was it? One than which, after the divine crown, there is none more beautiful or glorious in heaven. What sort of a glory was hers? Oh, to no purpose do I ask the question; to no purpose should I lift up my weak eyes to behold the brilliancy of that glory, the greatness of which, as St. Bernard says, the Almighty has reserved to Himself alone to fathom! All the blessed in heaven are filled with joy and glory, so that there is nothing more they can wish for; but the happiness of them all put together falls far short of that of this most glorious Virgin; all their riches heaped together might well be termed poverty in comparison with the unspeakable wealth of their Queen; for there is, so to speak, an infinite distance between the Mother of God and His servants.

The departure of Mary from this world meant her going to Jesus Christ. This is quite enough to enable us to form some idea of the abundance of her joy and glory, as far as it can be understood by us. For is it not a great happiness for a mother to come to her son? For such a mother to come to such a son? For such a loving mother to come to such a loving son, the longing to see whom constituted her only sickness? Fathers and mothers, I take you all as witnesses; what would your feelings be if word were brought you that your only beloved son, whom you have not seen for twenty years, has suddenly, after many dangers and hardships by sea and land, returned rich and prosperous, and is now not far from you? What would your feelings be when that son, on entering the house, throws his arms around your neck and receives your welcome? Sweet tears of joy would certainly be the first welcome you would give him. I can imagine this when I think of the Patriarch Jacob, when he came to the land of Egypt, and there found his dearest son Joseph, whom he had lost for many years, and beheld him raised to be the ruler of the land from being a poor shepherd boy; little was wanting to make the good old man die of joy; certainly he desired nothing more on earth: “Now shall I die with joy, because I have

Of her going to Jesus, her Son.

¹ *Repletus sum consolatione, superabundo gaudio in omni tribulatione nostra.—II. Cor. vii. 4.*

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seen thy face.”¹ I can imagine it, when I think of Anna, daily ascending to the top of the mountain, and there turning her tearful eyes in every direction, looking for her son Tobias, and when she at last saw him coming, running to the house to bring the joyful news to her blind husband. “Behold, thy son cometh.”² Tears come into my eyes whenever I read that part of the holy Scriptures, and see how the two ran to meet their son: “And his father that was blind, rising up, began to run, stumbling with his feet; and giving a servant his hand, went to meet his son. And receiving him, kissed him, as did also his wife, and they began to weep for joy.”³

Who raised
her above
all creatures
in glory.

Judge, my dear brethren, of Mary’s joy on first entering into heaven; when she saw that Son of hers whom she had borne in her womb, brought forth in the stable at Bethlehem, nourished at her virginal bosom, and brought up in the workshop of the poor carpenter; whom she had seen with her own eyes hanging on the shameful gibbet of the cross, done to death between two thieves; whose bodily presence she had to do without for so many years; when she saw, I say, this Son of hers, seated on the right hand of His Father on the throne of the Almighty God, ruling the universe, coming to meet her with all the choirs of the angels, embracing her and placing her on a throne beside Himself, and declaring her Queen of heaven and earth, whom virgins, confessors, martyrs, prophets, apostles, and all the angels and elect were to acknowledge and revere as their sovereign lady, and whom that same Son of hers made the dispensatrix of all His graces, treasures, and gifts, which men were in future to receive through her hands. Let him who can understand this joy.

Joyful con-
gratulation
offered to
Mary.

O happy and joyful death of Mary! Or, to speak more correctly, glorious victory over death, and change of this mortal life for an eternal existence! This is the day, O Virgin, on which thou didst experience this happiness, on which thou didst hold thy triumphal entry into the kingdom of heaven! The angels rejoice, I say again, and with a thousand expressions of the warmest congratulations men on earth rejoice with thee, too! Let it be permitted me to unite my soul with thine, in order to praise and

¹ Jam lætus moriar, quia vidi faciem tuam.—Gen. xlii. 30.

² Ecce venit filius tuus.—Tob. xi. 6.

³ Et consurgens cæcus pater ejus, cœpit offendens pedibus currere, et data manu puero occurrit obviam filio suo. Et suscipiens osculatus est eum cum uxore suo; et cœperunt ambo flere præ gaudio.—Ibid. 10, 11.

glorify that Lord who has undertaken and accomplished such great things in thee; let me be permitted to utter His praise in the words thou thyself didst speak of old: "My soul doth magnify the Lord, and my spirit hath rejoiced in God, my Saviour;" because, O most humble of all mortals, He hath raised thee above heaven and earth, so that for all eternity all the nations of earth shall call thee blessed! Rejoice, then, O most happy Virgin, in the immense treasures of thy glory! And meanwhile, since the heavens possess thee as their Queen, do not forget that thou art nevertheless the Mother of mercy for us, thy children, whom thou hast left behind in this vale of tears; and while seated on thy throne of glory, deign to cast thy eyes on us who appeal to thee with prayers and entreaties: Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners, now, and at the hour of our death!

At the hour of our death! Alas, what does this last thought bring before my mind! How will it be with me, with this or that one, in the moment when the soul is trembling on the lips, and is ready to take its departure? When the words of the priest shall resound in my ears, if I have the happiness of receiving the last sacraments: "Depart, Christian soul, out of this world"? What shall my feelings be when death is about to close the eyes of the body, but to open those of the mind, and to lay before me clearly the past and the future? When I shall see behind me my past life, and before me an uncertain eternity; behind me the precious time of my childhood, youth, and manhood, the least part of which I have given to my God, the greater part of which I have spent so uselessly, so foolishly, so wickedly; in any moment of that time I could have gained an immortal crown. Before me is the throne of the Judge, who will demand a strict account of every moment of my life; behind me are the grievous, countless sins that I have committed in the town, in that house, in that garden, in that company, with this or that person, or alone by myself, in thought, word, and deed; and at the same time I shall look back on many, but perhaps not very candid confessions, and on a few good works I performed. Before me I shall see the God of vengeance, who will not allow the least sin, no matter how small, to go unpunished; behind me I shall behold the vain, dangerous, sinful amusements and pleasures that have now come to an end for me; before me are the never-ending pains of hell, that I am not sure of escaping. Will this be likely to give me joyful feelings at the hour of death? My dear brethren, these thoughts

We should often think of what our death will be like.

seem indeed troublesome ones; yet they well deserve our serious and frequent consideration, and we ought to call them to mind more often, perhaps, than we have been accustomed to do hitherto, otherwise they will come too late. But I will say no more of them now, lest I should interfere with the joy of this feast.

What a
comfort at
the hour of
death to
have lived
piously!

One thing alone we should ponder on deeply: what a comfort and consolation it must be on the bed of death to think that we have lived piously; to be able to say that we have served God truly, in the moment when the soul is about to leave the body! What a comfort to be able, with all humility, but at the same time with truth, to use the words of Our Lord: "I have finished the work which Thou gavest Me to do: And now I come to Thee"¹ Oh, what a comfort, I repeat, to be able to say with truth: My Lord and my God, Thou hast called me to the priesthood, to labor for my own soul and the souls of others: "I have finished the work;" I have done the best I could: "and now I come to Thee"! Thou hast made me a judge, a superior, an advocate: "I have finished the work;" I have performed the duties of my state according to the Christian law, without ever allowing myself to be led aside from the path of strict justice and right, before men and before Thee, by bribery or human respect: "and now I come to Thee." Thou hast called me to the married state; I have lived in it solely for the end for which Thou hast called me thereto; I have preserved conjugal fidelity unbroken, and done my best to bring up my children from their earliest years, not according to the vain world, but, as Thy commandments require, to true devotion and the zealous service of Thee; I have endeavored to leave them as a legacy, not so much gold and silver as Thy fear and love; so that after my death I might leave some behind me to serve Thee faithfully: "and now I come to Thee"! Thou hast called me to a business life; I do not remember to have wronged any one in the least; I have always used just weights and measures, and the business of my soul was always the chief thing with me: "and now I come to Thee"! Thou hast called me to the workshop, to agriculture, to be a laborer, and to work for others; I have been content with my state, and have done my work with a good intention for Thy honor: "and now I come to Thee"! Thou hast endowed me with wealth; I have not squandered it on vanity and folly, but received it from Thy beneficent hand with

¹ Opus consummavi, quod dedisti mihi ut faciam: nunc autem ad te venio.—John xvii. 4, 18.

humble gratitude and due appreciation, and served Thee all the more zealously on account of it; the poor and needy have had their share of it: "and now I come to Thee"! Thou hast sent me, occasionally, poverty, desolation, different kinds of sickness, shame and disgrace, crosses and trials; I have taken them all from Thy fatherly hand without murmuring, suffered them with patience for Thy sake, and always loved and praised Thee, my God, when in adversity: "and now I come to Thee"! Thou hast made Thy law known to me; I have not transgressed it in any grievous matter; or otherwise I have done true penance for my sins, and amended my life; in a word, O my God, "I have finished the work which Thou gavest me to do"! What remains now for me but to come to Thee with a good heart to receive my reward? Yes, O Lord, now I come to Thee; here I am; receive my soul!

O death, how happy, how sweet and consoling thou must be, when a pious life has preceded thee! With what joy that soul leaves the world which has served God truly! The good can speak in exultant tones, laugh, sing, and await death without the least fear, loving and praising God in their last illness, and feeling the greatest consolation even to the final moment; and experience teaches us the truth of this. Who would not join in the wish of the Prophet: "Let my soul die the death of the just, and my last end be like to them"?¹ Where I die, how I die, when I die, makes little matter, if I only die the death of the just. Whether I die here or in another town; at home or in the open field; in bed or on a chair, is a thought that troubles me but little, provided my death be the death of the just. Whether I die after a long illness, or by a fit of apoplexy; whether I am drowned, or pierced by a sword, or shot, or struck by lightning, or murdered by an assassin, or meet my death by any other accident, is all the same to me, if only I die the death of the just. Let me die in this year or in the next, to-day or to-morrow, in youth or in old age, in the day or the night; I do not concern myself about such things; if I only die the death of the just, in the grace of God, that is all I can desire!

Such a death is alone desirable.

Ah, my dear brethren, now is the time for us to labor to fulfil this wish. In the ordinary course of things the death of the just follows only on the life of the just. We think and say, when

Exhortation so to live that we may rejoice at

¹ *Moriatur anima mea morte justorum, et fiant novissima mea horum similia.*—Num. xxiii. 10.

the hour of
death.

present at a happy death: ah, how I should like to die like that man! Let us, then, endeavor with all our might to live like him. When death shall come, we know not; perhaps to-day, perhaps this very hour; and on it depends not only the last painful or joyful moment, not only a few hundred years, but a whole long happy or miserable eternity. Let us often think of this (good God, how little we lay to heart this important truth!); let us now do what we shall then wish to have done; let us now avoid what we shall then wish to have avoided; let us now gather together that which shall then fill us with consolation and happiness. If our conscience does not allow us to rejoice in the thought that we have never offended God grievously, let us at least so act now that we may then think, to our consolation, that we have done true penance for all our sins, and after having committed them, tried to serve God with all the more zeal.

Prayer to
Mary for
a happy
death.

And thou, most blessed of all virgins, bounteous Mother Mary, my only hope and comfort after God in this vale of tears! show thy mercy, I beg of thee, to me and all here present, especially in that hour. The afflicted and sorrowful constantly surround thy image here, begging, praying, and entreating thee to help them, and singing to thee: Stretch forth thy bounteous and generous hand to us. And thou hearest their cries, and refuseth no one. I, too, fall down at thy feet, and implore thee for a grace that is far more becoming thy generosity, namely, I require thy help in the greatest necessity. To thee I commend my body, my soul, my life, but above all my death. If thou takest charge of me, then my life, my death, my eternity are all safe; now I am assured that as my Mother thou wilt take under thy care all who serve thee as thy true children, who love thee from their hearts, who rejoice at thy honor and praise, and who in addition to leading pious lives commit themselves to thee with childlike confidence. If I am not worthy to be reckoned among these, then I will strive to become so as long as the breath of life is in me, and in my departure from this world I will rejoice and console myself in the thought that after God I must ascribe my happiness to thee; that happiness that I hope to enjoy with thee and thy Son forever in heaven. Amen.

THIRTY-FIFTH SERMON.

ON MARY AS THE ARK OF THE COVENANT.

Subject.

All Treves with good reason holds Mary in the highest honor, for this city has already received and will again receive signal favors from her.—*Preached on the occasion of a procession held to return thanks.*

Text.

Omnis domus Israel ducebant arcam testamenti Domini in júbilo.—II. Kings vi. 15.

“All the house of Israel brought the ark of the covenant of the Lord with joyful shouting.”

Introduction.

When I consider the vast crowds that have assembled to-day to join in this magnificent procession, I imagine I behold that joyful assembly and procession of the children of Israel which I find described in the sixth chapter of the Second Book of Kings, when they brought the ark of the covenant from the house of Obedom to the city of David. On that occasion, after having conquered the Philistines, they called together all the priests and tribes and families of Israel to hold a splendid feast of thanksgiving and to offer a sacrifice: “All the house of Israel brought the ark of the covenant of the Lord with joyful shouting, and with sound of trumpet.” Such, I say, seems to me to be the solemnity celebrated by so many Christians to-day; at which I see assembled the clergy and priesthood, the religious from the abbeys and monasteries, the counsellors with the guilds and citizens of this town, to hold a feast of thanksgiving, with joyful songs resounding everywhere, amid the sound of musical instruments; but their sacrifice and thanksgiving feast is a much holier one than that of old; so that in truth I need change only one word in my text, and say: All the house of Treves brought the ark of the covenant of the Lord with joyful shouting. What ark? She who was born on this day to the great joy of the world, she who was prefigured in the Old Testament, and called by the holy Fathers and the Catholic Church the living ark of God, in which

the Lawgiver Himself, the true Bread of heaven, was kept: namely, Mary, the most blessed and virginal Mother of the Lord. And indeed not without reason; for if the Israelites of old had cause to accompany the ark with jubilation and gladness, we Christians have much more reason to honor Mary with joy and exultation, as I shall show in this panegyric, as far as time and your patience shall permit. My subject is:

Plan of Discourse.

In olden times all Israel held the ark of the covenant in great esteem, and kept festivals of thanksgiving and gratitude in its honor; because by it they received many favors from God. With much more reason does all Treres now hold Mary in the highest esteem, and keep a festival of joy and thanksgiving in her honor; for we have received much greater favors, and shall still receive them through her. To the end that we may all be encouraged to preserve and increase our esteem, confidence, love, and gratitude towards this holy Virgin.

Grant, O most powerful and generous Mother Mary, that this may be the case with us! And you, O angels, all of whom, and not merely two, as was the case with the ark, honor Mary in the most profound humility, help us hereto with your intercession!

The ark of the covenant was held in high esteem on account of the benefits received from God by the Israelites by its means.

The benefits bestowed by God on the Israelites on account of the honor they paid the ark in olden times were chiefly fourfold: in the first place, victory over their enemies, so that the Israelites never engaged in battle until they had the ark in their tents, as we have just heard of David. And in the Book of Numbers, tenth chapter, we read that when Moses caused the ark to be lifted up, he said with the greatest confidence: "Arise, O Lord! and let Thy enemies be scattered, and let them that hate Thee flee from before Thy face."¹ When Josue was besieging the city of Jericho, he caused the ark to be carried round the walls, and without his making any use of weapons the walls tumbled down, and all the inhabitants were put to the sword by the Israelites. Secondly, in all doubts the ark was the refuge by which they sought counsel and advice from God. Thus Saul, when he wished to know the cause of the tumult in the enemy's army, said to Achias: "Bring the ark of the Lord."² The third

¹ Surge, Domine, et dissipentur inimici tui, et fugiant qui oderunt te a facie tua.—Num. x. 35.

² Applica arcam Dei.—I. Kings xiv. 18.

benefit was help in their necessities; this they especially experienced in that miraculous passing of the river Jordan; for when the ark was carried on in front, all the people passed over dry-shod: "The waters that came down from above stood in one place, and swelling up like a mountain were seen afar off . . . and all the people passed over through the channel that was dried up."¹ The fourth benefit consisted of copious graces and blessings; while the ark rested for some months in the house of Obbedom, says the Scripture, "the Lord blessed Obbedom, and all his household."² These graces and miracles caused the Israelites to regard their ark with the utmost esteem, confidence, and reverence; so that to lose it seemed to them the same as to be abandoned by God and reduced to desperation. Therefore when it was announced to the high-priest Heli that his two sons were slain, and the ark taken by the Philistines, he fell at once from his chair, dead, to the ground, so grieved was he at the loss of the ark: "And when he had named the ark of God, he fell from his stool backwards by the door, and broke his neck and died;" and his daughter-in-law could only ejaculate: "The glory is gone from Israel, because the ark of God was taken!"³ Now there is an end to all our hopes, our consolations and confidence!

But let the Israelites be silent about their ark made of wood. They had only the outward shell; we have the kernel; they were happy in the possession of the shadow; we have the substance; they honored the figure; we, in honoring Mary, revere the truth and reality. The benefits to be hoped for from the ark were only fourfold, and conferred only temporal graces and blessings, and even these were granted only in consideration of the ark prefigured by theirs. "What can be worthy of his benefits?"⁴ we may well say in the words in which Tobias spoke of his faithful companion, the angel. How can we repay the benefits we now receive through Mary? The goods we owe to her are eternal, temporal, heavenly, earthly, corporal, and spiritual; all imaginable goods in copious abundance are showered down on Christians in

Greater and more numerous are the benefits that Christians receive through Mary.

¹ *Steterunt aquæ descendentes in loco uno, et ad instar montis intumescentes apparebant procul . . . omnique populus per arenam alveum transibat.*—Josue iii. 16, 17.

² *Benedixit Dominus Obbedom, et omnem domum ejus.*—II. Kings vi. 11.

³ *Cumque ille nominasset arcam Dei, cecidit de sella retrorsum juxta ostium, et fractis cervicibus mortuus est. Translata est gloria ab Israel, quia capta est arca Dei.*—I. Kings iv. 18, 21.

⁴ *Quid dignum poterit esse beneficiis ejus?*—Tob. xii. 2.

streams by this living ark of God; and I should require the tongues of all the saints to be able to describe them.

Shown from
the holy
Fathers.

Nay, even if I were to speak with all these tongues, I still could not enumerate her benefits according to their full value and worth, for the Fathers and Doctors of the Church are all at a loss to find words to explain Mary's power and goodness to us, and the great necessity in which we are of her help and intercession. 'Therefore she is briefly called by St. Bernard: the channel of divine grace ;¹ our greatest hope; the Mother of all blessings. By St. Germanus: the general dispensatrix of all good things ;² our saviour from misery. By St. Ephrem: the well-grounded happiness and salvation of all Christians ;³ the anchor of human hope ; the helper of the destitute. By St. Augustine: the temple of God's mercy.⁴ By St. Bonaventure: the salvation and medicine of the world ;⁵ a valley of blessings.⁶ By St. Lawrence Justinian : the consolation of our pilgrimage.⁷ By St. Damascene: an abyss of grace ;⁸ the sole alleviation of our difficulties. By St. Thomas of Aquin: our help in all dangers. By the learned Idiota: the treasury of God's graces.⁹ By her, he continues, and in her, and with her, and from her the world has and will have every good.¹⁰

Confirmed
by experi-
ence.

Why should we seek for many testimonies in proof of this? Let experience, let all Christendom speak, and bring before us all the benefits that Mary has conferred on her servants of both sexes, of all conditions, young and old, rich and poor, at all times, in all places, in all circumstances. What an ocean of graces they will set before our eyes! Let the many glorious victories speak which were gained by Mary's help against the enemies of the Christians; such as those gained by Heraclius against the Persians ; by Narses against the Goths ; by Zemisca against the Bulgarians ; by Pelagius against the Arabs; by Alphonsus against the Moors; by the Portuguese against the Angolans; by the Germans, in our own times, against the Turks. Let the dumb speak

¹ Aquæductus divinæ gratiæ.

² Publica bonorum omnium procuratrix.

³ Salus firma Christianorum omnium.

⁴ Templum misericordiæ Dei.

⁵ Salus orbis et medicina.

⁶ Vallis benedictionis.

⁷ Solatium peregrinationis nostræ.

⁸ Abyssus gratiæ.

⁹ Thesauraria gratiarum Dei.

¹⁰ Et in ipsa, et cum ipsa, et ab ipsa habet mundus, et habiturus est omne bonum.—Idiota in Dial. de B. V. M.

who through her have recovered their speech; the blind who were restored to sight; the deaf who were made to hear; the lame who were enabled to walk; the sick who regained their health; the ignorant who were instructed; the sorrowful who were comforted; the prisoners who were set free; those in danger who were rescued; the despairing who received courage and hope from this ark of the covenant, Mary. St. Bonaventure appeals to all, saying: "Who is there on whom the sun does not shine? And who is there who is not illumined by the mercy of Mary?"¹

That we may not have to seek further testimony among foreign nations, let our ancient city of Treves tell us how it has always considered itself specially bound to this blessed virgin, and how many graces and gifts, in temporal and spiritual things, in peace and war, it has received from her hands. What else is the meaning of so many devotions, public and private, held in her honor? Of the different sodalities for both sexes established under her patronage? Of the solemn and joyful procession held on this day, which, as we know, was instituted by way of thanksgiving for being freed from a foreign yoke? What else is the meaning of the general recourse to her churches and images in dangers and necessities, in sickness and misfortune and trouble? What else the frequent communions that, thank God! are always to be witnessed on her feast days? What else is the meaning of that confidence and love for the Mother of God that is implanted in the minds of the young, and fostered by instructions, sermons, and exhortations; so that all may have a great esteem for Mary, acknowledge the debt of gratitude they owe her, and at the same time confess that she is the ark by which God gives His bounties, graces, helps, and blessings to the whole city, nay, to the whole world? "Let him alone, O Blessed Virgin!" exclaims St. Bernard, "say nothing of thy mercy who, having implored thy help in necessity, has found thee deaf to his appeal."² But I may well exclaim in the words of Our Lord: "If these shall hold their peace, the stones will cry out."³ The walls of the churches will cry out which are covered with votive offerings, as so many proofs of benefits received through Mary; the chapels and altars will cry out, and with their gold and silver tongues will proclaim the

Especially
by that of
the city of
Treves.

¹ Quis est super quem sol non luceat? Quis est super quem misericordia Mariæ non resplendeat?

² Sileat misericordiam tuam, Virgo beata, qui te suis in necessitatibus invocatum, sibi unquam meminertit defuisse!

³ Si hi tacuerint, lapides clamabunt.—Luke xix. 40.

assistance rendered by her; the burning lights and lamps that are always lighted before her pictures will announce her praise; the statues and memorials erected to her in all the streets and in private houses will tell us of the graces bestowed by her hand. All these are testimonies of the constant aid and many benefits conferred by Mary on her servants and children. And what else will they say to us, but what Blossius said to her: "Heaven and earth shall pass away before any one who implores thy help shall find himself abandoned."¹

The ark of the covenant was a refuge for criminals.

What shall I say now of the graces that we poor sinners receive from Mary for our souls and our salvation? The ark among the Israelites was covered with the celebrated golden so-called propitiatory, or throne of grace and atonement, as we read in the Book of Exodus, thirty-seventh chapter; and if any one transgressed the law, he had to offer sacrifice for sin, in order to appease the Almighty, obtain pardon, and escape punishment. The tabernacle, too, in which the ark stood, was a sanctuary for evil-doers, as we read in the second chapter of the Third Book of Kings, where it is related that Joab, when sought by Solomon for exciting rebellion, took refuge in the tabernacle: "Joab fled into the tabernacle of the Lord, and took hold of the horn of the altar."² In the same chapter we read that Solomon slew without mercy all who had taken sides with Adonias, his brother; and one of the chief rebels was Abiathar, one of the priests; the latter he called to him. "Indeed thou art worthy of death,"³ he said; you have seen how your companions have fared, and you know that you do not deserve a better fate; "But I will not at this time put thee to death;"⁴ your life is spared. Why was the king so gracious to this man, although he had not shown any mercy to the others, and had not spared even his own brother? "I will not at this time put thee to death." Why? Hear the reason: "Because thou didst carry the ark of the Lord God."⁵

Mary is the refuge of sinners.

O sinner, where should you be, where should I have been long ago, if Mary had not been a throne of grace and propitiation, and, as Andreas Cretensis calls her, a refuge of sinners? You and I have been rebels, not against a mortal Solomon, but against

¹ *Cœlum et terra perierint, citius quam tu aliquem, serio te implorantem, tua ope destitueris.*

² *Fugit ergo Joab in tabernaculum Domini, et apprehendit cornu altaris.—III. Kings ii. 28.*

³ *Equidem vir mortis es.—Ibid. 26.*

⁴ *Sed hodie te non interficiam.—Ibid.*

⁵ *Quia portasti arcam Domini Dei.—Ibid.*

⁶ *Commune propitiatorium.*

our great, almighty, and eternal God, and we have taken sides with the devil, His sworn enemy. "He hath stretched out his hand against God," says Eliphaz in the Book of Job, speaking of every sinner; "and hath strengthened himself against the Almighty."¹ How many there are who joined in our rebellion against God, perhaps at the same time, too! They committed the same sins as we, nay, they may have been less guilty, and now they have fallen victims to the just anger of God, and are condemned to the everlasting fire of hell. But you and I are still alive, and can still have a firm hope of salvation. Why? Has our debt been less than that of the others? Could not God long ago have said to us—may He not now say to us: "Indeed thou art worthy of death?" Thou knowest how often and grievously thou hast offended Me; thou hast deserved to die; but I have hitherto had patience with thee; thou art safe for a time: "I will not at this time put thee to death." Long ago have I heard the cries for vengeance sent to Me by thy various acts of injustice; by the cruelty with which thou hast oppressed the innocent; by thy unchaste desires, looks, conversations, and acts; thou art worthy of death. I have heard the cries of thy constant cursing, swearing, and blaspheming, of thy gluttony and drunkenness, of thy inveterate hatred, envy, and enmity towards thy neighbor, of thy sloth and tepidity in My service: all these things cry out against thee; thou art worthy of death; thy vices, known to thee and Me alone, have long ago drawn the sword of vengeance out of the scabbard; but "I will not at this time put thee to death;" I have restrained My anger, and have given thee and many others time and opportunity of repentance. Why? "Because thou didst carry the ark of the Lord God;" because thou hast honored Mary, My Mother. "Oh," exclaims Osorius, "how many would be now in hell if they had not carried this ark in their hearts!"² How many would not now be in heaven, how many would be condemned to hell, if they had not held fast by this ark—Mary! How many a town and country, perhaps sometimes this city of ours, God might have upbraided with its sins, saying: "Thou art worthy of death!" City of Treves, thou hast often been ungrateful for the benefits received from Me, yet I have conferred them on thee; thou hast often deserved (and perhaps still de-

¹ Tetendit enim adversus Deum manum suam, et contra omnipotentem roboratus est. —Job xv. 25.

² O quam multi ad infernum jam essent detrusi, nisi hanc portassent arcam in corde suo. —Oscr. Serm. 4. de Devot. ad B. V. M.

servest) to be severely punished, yet I have kept the chastisement from thee, or lessened it, "because thou didst carry the ark of the Lord;" because thou hast honored My Mother in a special manner!

Exhortation
and purpose
to honor
Mary con-
stantly.

With good reason, then, do we hold this feast of joy and thanksgiving in honor of Mary; with far better reason than the Israelites of old had for their feasts. Let us, then, unanimously conclude with St. Bernard: "With all our hearts and souls let us honor Mary, for such is the wish of Him who desires that we should have everything through Mary."¹ Let her, after God, be our only hope, our refuge, our consolation! "Let us raise our hearts and hands to her."² Let us offer ourselves to her, and from year to year, from day to day, from hour to hour, renew the pledge of our fidelity! Yes, truly, divine Mother, virginal Mary, true ark of the covenant between God and man! such is the wish of us all; behold prostrate at thy feet the whole city of Treves, which is devoted to thee; with the utmost submission and the greatest gratitude it acknowledges itself bound to thee on account of the many benefits it has received from thee, the greatness of which is known to thee better than to us! Accept, O most gracious Virgin, this day as a day of triumph and honor for thyself, as a sacrifice of the praise we owe thee by a thousand titles, a praise which shall be renewed publicly every year and privately every day in sign of our gratitude. "For the thought of man shall give praise to thee; and the remainders of the thought,"³ those who are to come after us, "shall keep holiday to thee."⁴ All unite with me in renewing the promise so often made in the different confraternities, by which they pay homage to thee as to their Queen and sovereign Lady. Take me as thy perpetual servant; we promise we shall never leave thee; we shall do all we can to further thy praise and service; we shall not abandon thee as long as a drop of honorable blood flows in our veins. And wo to us if we ever leave thee! Where should we go? What would become of us?⁴ as St. Germanus says. What misfortunes should we not have to fear if we were deprived of thy protection? If we only continue to be true to thee and love thee, if thou continuest to

¹ Totis ergo medullis cordium, et votis omnibus Mariam hanc veneremur, quia sic est voluntas ejus, qui nos totum habere voluit per Mariam.

² Cor nostrum cum manibus ad eam erigamus.

³ Cogitatio hominis confitebitur tibi, et reliquæ cogitationis diem festum agent tibi.—Pa. lxxv. 11.

⁴ Quid de i obis fiet?

shield us; oh, then, more than happy we! Who shall harm us? We are assured, with St. Damascene, “that if we have an invincible hope in thee we shall be safe, and if we are under thy protection we shall have no reason to fear.”¹ Do not, then, ever turn thy merciful and compassionate eyes away from us, who with full confidence fly to thee for help and refuge! Preserve under thy mantle this city dedicated to thee; avert, since thou canst do all things by thy Son, the punishments impending over us and the calamitous times that an angry Heaven seems now to be threatening; we humbly acknowledge that we have deserved to be chastised for our many sins, which we now hate and detest with contrite hearts! Help us in all our necessities, and especially in the dangers that threaten our souls and our salvation! Thus we promise and pray and trust, O sovereign Queen of heaven; we, thy humble vassals! O mighty Lady, we are thy meanest servants! O Mother of mercy, most powerful advocate, we are thy children of Treves, completely devoted to thee. Amen.

THIRTY-SIXTH SERMON.

ON MARY AS THE TRUE JUDITH.

Subject.

The holding of this procession of thanksgiving is and shall be a great advantage for the land of Treves.—*Preached on the occasion of a public procession.*

Text.

Vocaverunt presbyteros civitatis, et concurrerunt ad eam omnes, a minimo usque ad maximum.—Judith xiii. 14, 15.

“They called the ancients of the city, and all ran to meet her, from the least to the greatest.”

Introduction.

So did the Hebrews in the town of Bethulia, when they all went out to meet Judith, their heroine; so, too, do Christians on this day, in the city of Treves, when they all come out to hold a feast of joy and thanksgiving in honor of Mary, their patroness. There was good reason for the former; still better reason for the latter.

¹ *Insuperabilem, Deipara, spem tuam habens, servabor, defensionem tuam possidens, non timebo.*

Plan of Discourse.

The feast they then celebrated was advantageous for the Hebrews; that which we hold now is and shall be advantageous in a greater degree for the Christians of Treves: as I shall briefly prove without further preface.

I rely on the assistance of Mary and of the holy angels.

Bethulia was in great straits.

A great benefit deserves great gratitude. The town of Bethulia was beset on all sides by the numerous army of Holofernes, as we read in the seventh chapter of the Book of Judith; its water supply had been cut off, and the inhabitants were driven to such straits, and reduced to such desperation, that they all met weeping and wailing, and agreeing unanimously to deliver themselves over as a sacrifice to the enemy. "Then all the men and women," says the Scripture, "young men and children, gathering themselves together to Ozias, all together with one voice said: God be judge between us and thee, for thou hast done evil against us in that thou wouldst not speak peaceably with the Assyrians, and for this cause God hath sold us into their hands. And therefore there is no one to help us, while we are cast down before their eyes in thirst, and great destruction. And now assemble ye all that are in the city, that we may of our own accord yield ourselves all up to the people of Holofernes. . . . that our end may be short by the edge of the sword, which is made longer by the drought of thirst. And when they had said these things, there was great weeping and lamentation of all in the assembly." ¹

But was freed by Judith, and it held a feast in her honor.

In this miserable condition Judith was the only one who promised them help and inspired them with courage and confidence. Weak woman as she was, her only arms were confidence in God; relying on this, she ventured into the enemy's camp, and cut off the head of Holofernes as he lay in a drunken sleep, whereby his whole army was filled with such a panic that it fled in the greatest confusion, leaving everything behind. Though the Scripture had said nothing of it, it would be easy to imagine the joy, exultation, congratulations, gratitude, and

¹ Tunc ad Oblam congregati omnes viri feminæque, juvenes et parvuli, omnes simul una voce dixerunt: Judicet Deus inter nos et te, quoniam fecisti in nos mala, volens loqui pacifice cum Assyriis, et propter hoc vendidit nos Deus in manibus eorum. Et ideo non est qui adjuvet, cum prosternamur ante oculos eorum in siti et perditione magna. Et nunc congregati universos, qui in civitate sunt, ut sponte tradamus nos omnes populo Holofernis. . . . et sit finis noster brevis in ore gladii, qui longior efficitur in ariditate sitis. Et cum hæc dixissent, factus est fletus et ululatus magnus.—Judith vii. 12-15, 17, 18.

honor with which the town met Judith. As soon as the inhabitants heard her voice, as she was returning with the head of Holofernes, they all went to meet her: "And it came to pass when the men had heard her voice that they called the ancients of the city, and all ran to meet her, from the least to the greatest. And lighting up lights, they all gathered round about her."¹ They celebrated a most joyful feast, and held a procession to thank the Almighty who had freed his people by the courage of Judith: "And all the people rejoiced with the women and virgins and young men, playing on instruments and harps."² On the one side nothing was heard but the shouts of joy with which Judith was welcomed and extolled up to the heavens; "They all blessed her with one voice, saying: Thou art the glory of Jerusalem, thou art the joy of Israel, thou art the honor of our people."³ "Blessed art thou, O daughter! by the Lord, the most high God, above all women upon the earth. Blessed be the Lord God who made heaven and earth, who hath directed thee to the cutting off the head of the prince of our enemies, because He hath so magnified thy name this day that thy praise shall not depart out of the mouth of men."⁴ And on the other side, nothing was seen but sacrifices and thank-offerings, by which they showed their gratitude to the Lord of hosts for the victory obtained: "They all offered holocausts and vows, and their promises."⁵ The glorious day on which the victory was gained was placed in the number of holy days, and on its yearly recurrence the Jews used to go to Jerusalem, with great pomp and magnificence, to fulfil their vows and show their gratitude.

My dear brethren, I cannot find in Holy Writ a better symbol of the feast we celebrate to-day. How the city of Treves was in great straits, how much it suffered in the troublous times of war, how hard it was oppressed under a foreign yoke by enemies who not only besieged it from without, but also

In former times the city of Treves was in great straits.

¹ Cum audissent viri vocem ejus, vocaverunt presbyteros civitatis, et concurrerunt ad eam omnes a minimo usque ad maximum. Et accendentes luminaria congregaverunt circa eam universi.—Judith xiii. 14, 15, 16.

² Et omnes populi gaudebant cum mulieribus, et virginibus, et juvenibus, in organis et citharis.—Ibid. xv. 15.

³ Tu gloria Jerusalem, tu lætitia Israel, tu honorificentia populi nostri.—Ibid. 10.

⁴ Benedicta es tu, filia, a Domino Deo excelso, præ omnibus mulieribus super terram. Benedictus Dominus qui creavit cælum et terram, qui te direxit in vulnere capitis principis inimicorum nostrorum: quia hodie nomen tuum ita magnificavit, ut non recedat laus tua de ore hominum.—Ibid. l. xiii. :3—25.

⁵ Oblaerunt omnes holocausta, et vota, et repromissiones suas.—Ibid. xvi. 22.

deprived it of all freedom within its walls, so that it was once on the point of being burned to ashes; all this you will doubtless have learned from your ancestors, so that you are perhaps better able to speak of it than I am. The dumb monuments of foreign oppression that still remain in our midst bear testimony to the cruelty of the enemy. How many secret sighs (for then it was not allowed to complain openly), how many vows and promises didst thou not then send up to heaven, O city of Treves, in order to obtain thy freedom! Nor were thy prayers in vain; thy wishes were at last fulfilled, and thou wert freed from the burden thou hadst to bear so long, and which thou wert long desirous to cast from off thy shoulders.

But was
freed by
Mary, and it
held a feast
in her hon-
or.

And to whom dost thou ascribe this good fortune? I need not ask; this glorious day shows clearly enough who she is in whose honor this splendid procession is held that was vowed in those days. Mary is that far greater Judith, blessed among all the women on earth, towards whom thou dost now publicly acknowledge thy debt of gratitude. With nearly the same marks of honor as those with which the Bethulians received Judith dost thou now testify thy thanks to her. "They called the ancients of the city;" not otherwise than the Jews of old, all the prelates, priests, and religious of the city have assembled; "And all ran to meet her, from the least to the greatest;" all the citizens, their wives, sons, and daughters, from the least to the greatest, announce Mary's praise with prayers and hymns, with music and songs of joy. All cry out with unanimous voice and most intimate conviction: Thou art the glory and honor of our people; thou art the protectress of our city, the hope of our whole land. "They all offered holocausts and vows;" all now, in the holy sacrifice of the Mass, renew as a thanks-offering to Mary their vow and promise that every year this day shall be specially devoted to her honor, and that her love and praise shall never die out among their descendants. O happy, and for thee, most blessed Virgin, most honorable day! For it is but right that we should rejoice at the benefit we have received, and kiss the bounteous hand that bestowed it. It is at the same time a holy and gracious day for us, my dear brethren, for there is no better means of binding Mary to us and assuring ourselves of her favor and protection in future.

And has
reason to

The Scripture tells us that as long as Judith lived the city of Bethulia and the whole land of Israel enjoyed peace and

freedom from hostilities: "And all the time of her life there was none that troubled Israel."¹ The same canst thou, city and land of Treves, promise thyself of Mary with childlike confidence; as long as she is sincerely honored by thee on earth, so long will she be thy protectress in heaven. For if gratitude for a benefit deserves a fresh benefit, even among men who have otherwise such little sense of justice, what mayest thou not hope from that virgin who is of all mere creatures the most generous and bounteous, and who never abandons her servants when they acknowledge themselves bound to her? If gratitude is an acknowledgment of her power and liberality, and at the same time an humble confession of our wants and miseries, then nothing can be more agreeable to her, nor redound more to her honor, than such a confession, which must consequently prepare the way for fresh favors. "Such is Our Lord," says St. John Chrysostom of the Almighty God; and I say of Mary: Such is our Lady; "when we make known our gratitude to her, and acknowledge her as our benefactress, she bestows her favors on us more abundantly."²

hope for
her contin-
ued protec-
tion.

And even if she were not so disposed, yet this public, constant, and general exhibition of duty and service would at length incline her to look favorably upon you. A private devotion, the cry sent forth for help to Mary by some pious soul in the privacy of a bedroom, is powerful enough to win the friendship of this Mother of mercy; much more powerful, then, must be that devotion which cannot be confined within the bounds of the heart, but must appear before the world, and make itself evident to all, for certainly the honor and praise given to Mary is all the greater the more it is made known and published among men. If I look around me I behold the signs of a devotion which is not confined to one or two; it is a general unanimity of hearts, rejoicing and glorying in being servants and clients of Mary; it is a public and general homage given to their Queen by all in the sight of the world. What joy must it not cause this holy virgin to see a whole city, clergy and laity, from the least to the greatest, prostrate at her feet, vying with each other in sounding her praises, vowing constant fidelity and love to her, and encouraging each other herein by mutual example! Truly, if Jesus Christ assures

Precisely
because she
is publicly
honored by
the whole
town.

¹ In omni autem spatio vitæ ejus non fuit qui perturbaret Israel.—Judith xvi. 30.

² Talis est Dominus noster; quando in eum gratitudinem declaramus, et benefactorem agnoscimus, largius nobis erogat bona sua.

of His special protection two or three who are gathered together in His name, according to His words in the Gospel of St. Matthew: "Where there are two or three gathered together in My name, there am I in the midst of them;"¹ and shortly before He had said: "If two of you shall consent upon earth concerning anything whatsoever they shall ask, it shall be done to them by My Father who is in heaven;"² what may not be done with the Mother of God by two or three and more hundreds assembled in this place to do her honor and put themselves under her protection? I need not hesitate to say that you thus compel by a sweet violence all the might and power of Mary to be favorable to you now and forever; for, as the angelic doctor St. Thomas says, "It is almost impossible for the prayers of many not to be heard."³

**Exhortation
always to
show that
honor.**

My time is at an end, my dear brethren. Continue in the zeal with which you have begun this good work. What should we have to fear under the protection of such a patroness, who can so easily disarm and appease an angry God? Under the safeguard of that Queen who has power, not only over human, but also over infernal might? There is one thing she desires besides this outward show of honor, that, namely, of which Judith spoke to the citizens after their victory: "Praise ye the Lord, our God, who hath not forsaken them that hope in Him."⁴ Let all of you confess and honor His holy name, and be always true to His service; then you will experience the benefit of His help in all your necessities.

**Prayer and
recommendation
to
the Queen
of heaven.**

Behold, O Blessed Virgin, Mother of God! this is what we desire, and what we unanimously promise thee, besides the offering of our gratitude, namely, never during our lives to abandon the service of thee and thy Son for anything whatsoever. If there should be in this vast assemblage one lost sheep, who is not earnest in this resolution, who is cut off from the communion of saints by a grievous sin, for him, O sinder and dispensatrix of graces, we offer our prayers to thee. Add this to thy honor and glory, that this unfortunate soul may not go away hardened. Do not consider whether he is worthy of thy favor or not; rather hear the prayers and sighs of so many of thy servants who implore thy compassion; let him not leave this church or take part in the pro-

¹ Ubi sunt duo vel tres congregati in nomine meo, ibi sum in medio eorum.—Matt. xviii. 20.

² Si duo ex vobis consenserint super terram, de omni re quamcumque petierint fiet illis a Patre meo.—Ibid. 19.

³ Impossibile est preces multorum non exaudiri.

⁴ Laudate Dominum Deum nostrum, qui non deseruit sperantes in se.—Judith xiii. 17.

cession before having sincerely repented and made an earnest resolution of amendment! Preserve all present in the constant love of thy Son, that the enemy of souls may never be able to boast of having dragged to eternal fire one soul of this congregation which is devoted to thee! Thus will happen what with sure confidence we beg of and expect from thee, that, under the shadow of thy mantle, this city and land, protected by thy motherly care, shall always enjoy quiet, peace, unity, temporal, and, what is most important, eternal blessings, and that all our good fortune we shall ascribe to thee, after God. Amen.

THIRTY-SEVENTH SERMON.

ON MARY AS THE TRUE ESTHER.

(After the Manner of the Preceding Sermon.)

Subject.

This is a day that we should hold in perpetual honor, and celebrate with joy; for that is deserved by Mary, our protectress, and required by the hopes of prosperity we entertain through her help.—*Preached on the occasion of the same procession.*

Text.

Isti sunt dies quos nulla unquam delebit oblivio.—Esth. ix. 28.
“These are the days which shall never be forgot.”

Introduction.

Thanks be to God, dear Christians, that we have again assembled on this occasion! The fourth year has now passed since the horrors of war have interrupted this feast of gratitude and joy, yet during that time every one who truly loved Mary and his fatherland must have been mindful of his duty, and have made in the stillness of his heart his acknowledgments to the Queen of heaven, and thus have fulfilled by the wishes and desires of his heart what he could not do by public pomp and procession. Thanks be to God again for the benefit we must again ascribe to Mary, namely, that we are now enabled to celebrate this day publicly, and to give to her joyful tribute of our homage! “These are the

days which shall never be forgot;" so said the law of the Jews of old, after they had been freed from destruction by their Queen Esther. And I say: This is a day most joyful to all Christendom, and especially to the people of Treves, and one that should never be forgotten; one that should be celebrated with every mark of joy and honor; for what the Jews owed Esther, we owe Mary, as I now mean to show, to her honor and glory.

Plan of Discourse.

This is a day which should be kept in perpetual honor, and celebrated with joy; that is deserved by Mary, our protectress, and required by the hopes of prosperity we entertain through her help. Such is the whole subject.

Grant, O Queen of angels! that we may never again be hindered in the celebration of this festival.

After the
Jews had
been freed
by Esther
from de-
struction

In olden times, under the yoke of Assuerus, the Jewish people were in great straits. Aman, their sworn enemy, had sent messengers furnished with the king's seal throughout the land to announce that on a certain day all the Jews, young and old, women and children, should be put to death, and all their property confiscated, and the messengers had already done as they had been commanded, as we read in the third chapter of the Book of Esther. Poor people, what were your feelings on the occasion? Mardochai, the chief man of the Jews, as the sacred history tells us, "rent his garments, and put on sack-cloth, strewing ashes on his head; and he cried out with a loud voice in the street in the midst of the city, showing the anguish of his mind. And in all provinces, towns, and places to which the king's cruel edict was come, there was great mourning among the Jews, with fasting, wailing, and weeping, many using sack-cloth and ashes for their bed."¹ In this miserable condition Queen Esther was the only one to whom Mardochai in the name of all the Jews could appeal for help. Her intercession with the king was so powerful that the edict was completely revoked. Aman was hanged on a gallows, the orders sent out through the country were countermanded, and the Jews allowed perfect liberty on the

¹ Scidit vestimenta sua, et indutus est sacco, spargens cinerem capiti, et in platea mediæ civitatis voce magna clamabat, ostendens amaritudinem animi sui. In omnibus quoque provinciis, oppidis, ac locis, ad quæ crudele regis dogma pervenerat, planctus ingens erat apud Judæos, jejunium, ululatus, et fletus, sacco et cinere multis prostrato utentibus.—Esth. iv. 1, 3.

very day on which they were to have been delivered over to the swords of their enemies.

The people thus delivered from the jaws of death could hardly contain themselves for joy, and vied with one another in testifying their gratitude and esteem for their redemptress. "To the Jews a new light seemed to rise, with joy, honor, and dancing; and all the city rejoiced and was glad."¹ The two glorious days on which they obtained redemption and victory were by the command of Esther and Mardochai inscribed as a perpetual remembrance among the greatest days, and on their annual recurrence the Jews to this time testify their gratitude and joy by every kind of outward pomp and display. "These are the days which shall never be forgot," as we may read in detail in the chapter quoted.

They established a yearly festival with great joy and pomp.

Happy people, you will think, my dear brethren, who thus regained their freedom and prosperity by Esther, their queen! And truly it is so. But I say: happy the world, which by and through Mary, the Queen of heaven, has found a better and greater life and redemption! We need not describe the extremity of misery, want, and danger in which the whole human race was placed by the sin of Adam; all of us, his poor children, were condemned to eternal death, and sentence had been pronounced on us by the Almighty God; Mary was the Esther who found grace in the sight of the angry King of heaven, and she brought forth into the world the Saviour, by whose death we are freed from ruin, and from the slavery of the devil, set at liberty, and made children of God and heirs to the kingdom of heaven. This benefit is common to all throughout the world.

The world is saved by Mary from eternal ruin.

Happy Christendom, I say again, which as often as it was in danger of being made a sacrifice to the divine anger and justice has found refuge with the great Mother of God, who is, therefore, justly called by St. Ephrem "the salvation of all Christians."² When Jesus Christ appeared with three lances in His hand, and filled with anger at the sins and vices of men, as He was seen at Rome; or with three swords, as He appeared in Peru; or with the globe in His right hand, as if He were about to cast it from Him and destroy it, as He was seen at Spoleto; who then appeased His wrath? who took the lances and swords out of His

All Christendom has often been saved by her from grievous straits.

¹ *Judæis nova lux oriri visa est gaudium, honor, et tripudium; omnisque civitas exultavit atque lætata est.*—*Esth.* viii. 16, 15.

² *Salus omnium Christianorum.*

hand? Was it not, as history tells us, Mary, His Mother, on each occasion? But these, again, are instances of protection and help accorded by the Queen of heaven to all Christendom in general, and therefore all must acknowledge her to be their protectress.

Especially
the city of
Treves.

Happy Treves in being under the special protection of the Mother of God! How often hast thou not been helped and saved by her in dangers and necessities? Look back on the last century, which gave you occasion for this feast of joy. In what great straits thou wert then; how long thou wert compelled to groan under a foreign yoke; how thou hast suffered in war; how oppressive thy inhabitants found the monthly tribute they were obliged to pay, the daily labor they were compelled to undergo; how often wert thou not plundered and devastated; and already it was determined to give thee up to the flames; these and similar sufferings are still fresh in the memories of thy people, so that it is not necessary to describe them further, or to reopen old wounds by referring to the troublous times gone by. And if these things had slipped from our memories, so that none of us could speak of them, yet the razed walls and fortresses, the ruined churches that have not yet been fully restored, the poverty that still harasses the peasantry, show how severely the people suffered by the war. Ah, how often, then, O oppressed Treves! didst thou not send forth sighs to heaven in secret, for thou didst not dare to complain openly, but wert obliged to honor as thy masters and treat as thy friends those who showed themselves cruelly hostile to thee, and who meant to do still worse things to thee. But the great God, who is not wont to neglect the sighs of the oppressed, heard thy secret prayers, quietly indeed, but yet in such a way as to show before the world that He still looks on thee with favor. The cruel plans that were woven for thy destruction were suddenly, and contrary to thy expectation, frustrated, and thou sawest thyself saved from those from whom thou hadst nothing to expect but ruin and destruction. "A new light seemed to arise, with joy, honor, and dancing;" truly might those words be said of thee, as they were formerly of the Jews, "And all the city rejoiced and was glad."

With reason, then,
do the people of
Treves hold

But whom thou hast to thank for thy redemption is showed clearly enough by the great festival of to-day, on which thou holdest thy yearly procession in honor of her who saved thee. Mary, the Queen of heaven (on the day of whose nativity thy

freedom was gained), is the Esther to whom thou dost acknowledge thyself bound before all the world as thy protectress and saviour. Happy, and for thee, O Virgin, most deservedly honorable day! For it is meet that we should rejoice on account of a benefit received, and thank her from whose hand we have received it. Truly, "these are the days which shall never be forgot;" it is a day that all posterity must celebrate with every mark of honor and joy; with honor, for that is due to thee, O Mary! our redemptress, on many titles; with joy, for that is required by the hopes of prosperity we entertain through thy assistance in future.

a yearly.
fast in her
honor.

So it is, my dear brethren, and this hope of ours is well founded. The Scripture says that after Esther had obtained the freedom of her people by her intercession, "Esther, the queen, the daughter of Abihail, and Mardochai the Jew, wrote also a second epistle, that with all diligence this day should be established a festival for the time to come. And they sent to all the Jews that were in the hundred and twenty-seven provinces of King Assuerus that they should have peace and receive truth." The same canst thou, O city and land of Treves! promise thyself through Mary, thy Queen, and be assured that thou shalt enjoy peace as long as thou canst depend on her protection and intercession with her divine Son by thy constant and true devotion to her. For if in the general estimation of men gratitude for a benefit deserves a new benefit, what mayest thou not hope from the Mother of mercy, who, of all the children of men, is the most generous and faithful, and who never abandons her devoted servants when with childlike confidence they fly to her for refuge?

On account
of their
gratitude
they have
reason to
hope that,
under her
protection,
they will be
saved from
calamity in
future.

But in conclusion, my dear brethren, mark well what Mary expects and desires of us; namely, that of which Esther wrote to her people: "that they should receive truth," that is, that they should adore the true God and keep His law. Yes, great Queen of heaven and earth, so it shall be done! Besides testifying the gratitude we owe thee, we now all promise that we shall never again, for any cause whatsoever, abandon thy service and that of thy Son; for we know well that our sins and vices were the sole cause of all our troubles, of all the scourges that the just judgment of God had made us suffer hitherto. Obtain for all of us

Exhortation
and resolu-
tion to re-
main con-
stant in the
service of
God and
Mary.

¹ Scripseruntque Esther regina, filia Abihail, et Mardocheus, Judæus, etiam secundam epistolam, ut omni studio dies ista sollemnis sanciretur in posterum. Et miserunt ad omnes Judæos, qui in centum viginti septem provinciis regis Assueri versabantur, ut haberent pacem, et susciperent veritatem.—Esth. ix. 29, 30.

here present constant perseverance in our resolution to be true to thee and thy Son! Then will happen that which we with childlike confidence beg of and expect from thee, that our city and land shall never again be devastated by the horrors of war (which, as we have only too well learned by late experience, have moreover occasioned the loss of many souls in addition to the temporal evils they brought on us), and, protected by thee, shall never again be hindered from celebrating this glorious feast in thy honor, and shall enjoy constant repose, peace, and harmony. **Amen.**

